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D. LUTHER

"Now walk! walk" she repeated.

Chapter XVI

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SHREWSBURY



Stanley Weyman



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■

TO MY BROTHER HENRY
IN MEMORY OF A SUNDAY AFTERNOON
IN THE YEAR 1877 THIS BOOK IS
DEDICATED

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CHAPTER I

THAT the untimely death at the age of fifty-eight of that great prince, Charles, Duke of Shrewsbury, my most noble and generous patron, has afflicted me with a sorrow which I may truly call *acerbus et ingens*, is nothing to the world; which from one in my situation could expect no other, and, on the briefest relation of the benefits I had at his hands, might look for more. Were this all, therefore, or my task confined to such a relation, I should supererogate indeed in making this appearance. But I am informed that my lord duke's death has revived in certain quarters those rumours to his prejudice which were so industriously put about at the time of his first retirement; and which, refuted as they were at the moment by the express declaration of his Sovereign, and at leisure by his own behaviour, as well as by the support which at two great crises he gave to the Protestant succession, formed always a proof of the malice, as now of the persistence, of his enemies.

Still, such as they are, and though not these circumstances only, but a thousand others have time after time exposed them, I am instructed that they are again afloat; and find favour in circles where to think ill of public men is held the first test of experience. And this being the case, and my affection for my lord such as is natural, I perceive a clear duty. I do not indeed suppose that anyone can at this time of day effect that which the sense of all good men failed to effect while he lived—I mean the final

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killing of those rumours; nor is a plain tale likely to persuade those with whom idle reports, constantly furbished up, of letters seen in France, weigh more than a consistent life. But my lord's case is now, as I take it, removed to the Appeal Court of Posterity; which nevertheless a lie constantly iterated may mislead. To provide somewhat to correct this, and wherefrom future historians may draw, I who knew him well, and was in his confidence and in a manner in his employment at the time of Sir John Fenwick's case—of which these calumnies were always compact—propose to set down my evidence here; shrinking from no fulness, at times even venturing on prolixity, and always remembering a saying of Lord Somers', that often the most material part of testimony is that on which the witness values himself least. To adventure on this fulness, which in the case of many, and perhaps the bulk of writers, might issue in the surfeit of their readers, I feel myself emboldened by the possession of a brief and concise manner of writing; which, acquired in the first place in the circumstances presently to appear, was later improved by constant practice in the composition of my lord's papers.

And here some will expect me to proceed at once to the events of the year 1696, in which Sir John suffered, or at least 1695. But softly, and a little if you please *ab ovo*; since the particulars which enabled my lord's enemies to place a sinister interpretation on his conduct in those years had somewhat, and, alas, too much, to do with me. Therefore, before I can clear the matter up from every point of view, I am first to say who I am, and how I came to fall in the way of that great man and gain his approbation; with other preliminary matters, relating to myself, whereof some do not please at this distance, and yet must be set down, if with a wry face.

Of which, I am glad to say, that the worst—with one exception—comes first, or at least early. And with that, to proceed; premising always that, as in all that follows I am no one, and the tale is my lord's,

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I shall deal very succinctly with my own concerns and chancings, and where I must state them for clearness of narration, will do so *currente calamo* (as the ancients were wont to say), and so forthwith to those more important matters with which my readers desire to be made acquainted.

Suffice it, then, that I was born near Bishop's Stortford, on the borders of Hertfordshire, in that year so truly called the Annus Mirabilis, 1666; my father, a small yeoman, my mother of no better stock, she being the daughter of a poor parson in that neighbourhood. In such a station she was not likely to boast much learning, yet she could read, and having served two years in a great man's still-room, had acquired notions of gentility that went as ill with her station as they were little calculated to increase her contentment. Our house lay not far from the high road between Ware and Bishop's Stortford, which furnished us with frequent opportunities of viewing the King and Court, who were in the habit of passing that way two or three times in the year to Newmarket to see the horse-races. On these occasions we crowded with our neighbours to the side of the road, and gaped on the pageant, which lacked no show of ladies, both masked and unmasked, and gentlemen in all kinds of fripperies, and mettlesome horses that hit the taste of some among us better than either. On these excursions my mother was ever the foremost and the most ready; yet it was not long before I learned to beware of her hand for days after, and expect none but gloomy looks and fretful answers; while my father dared no more spell duty for a week than refuse the King's taxes.

Nevertheless, and whatever she was as a wife—and it is true she could ding my father's ears, and, for as handsome as she was, there were times when he would have been happier with a plainer woman—I am far from saying that she was a bad mother. Indeed, she was a kind, if fickle and passionate one,

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wiser at large and in intention than in practice and in small matters. Yet if for one thing only—and putting aside natural affection, in which I trust I am not deficient—she deserved to be named by me with undying gratitude. For having learned to read, but never to write, beyond, that is, the trifle of her maiden name, she valued scholarship both by that she had and that she had not; and in the year after I was breeched, prevailed on my father, who, for his part, good man, never advanced beyond the Neck Verse, to bind me to the ancient Grammar School at Bishop's Stortford, then kept by a Mr. G——.

I believe that there were some who thought this as much beyond our pretensions as our small farm fell below the homestead of a man of substance; and for certain, the first lesson I learned at that school was to behave myself lowly and reverently to all my betters, being trounced on arrival by three squires' sons, and afterwards, in due order and gradation, by all who had or affected gentility. To balance this I found that I had the advantage of my master's favour, and that for no greater a thing than the tinge of my father's opinions. For whereas the commonalty in that country, as in all the eastern counties, had been for the Parliament in the late troubles, and still loved a patriot, my father was a King's man; which placed him high in Mr. G——'s estimation, who had been displaced by the Rump and hated all of that side, and not for the loss of his place only, but, and in a far greater degree, for a thing which befell him later, after he had withdrawn to Oxford. For being of St. John's College, and seeing all that rich and loyal foundation at stake, he entered himself in a body of horse which was raised among the younger collegians and servants; and probably if he had been so lucky as to lose an eye or an arm in the field of honour, he would have forgiven Oliver all, and not the King's sufferings only, but his own. But in place of that it was his ill-chance to be one of a troop that, marching at night by the

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river near Wallingford, took fright at nothing and galloped to Abingdon without drawing rein; for which reason, and because an example was needed, they were disbanded. True, I never heard that the fault on that occasion lay with our master, nor that he was a man of less courage than his neighbours; but he took the matter peculiarly to heart, and never forgave the Roundheads the slur they had unwittingly cast on his honour; on the contrary, and in the event, he regularly celebrated the thirtieth of January by flogging the six boys who stood lowest in each form, and afterwards reading the service of the day over their smarting tails. By some, indeed, it was alleged that the veriest dunces, if of loyal stock, might look to escape on these occasions; but I treat this as a calumny.

That the good man did in truth love and favour loyalty, however, and this without sparing the rod in season, I am myself a bright and excellent example. For though I never attained to the outward flower of scholarship by proceeding to the learned degree of arts at either of the Universities, I gained the root and kernel of the matter at Bishop's Stortford, being able at the age of fourteen to write a fine hand, and read Eutropius and Cæsar, and teach the horn-book and Christ-Cross to younger boys. These attainments, and the taste for polite learning, which, as these pages will testify, I have never ceased to cultivate, I owe rather to the predilection which he had for me than to my own gifts; which, indeed, though doubtless I was always a boy of parts, I do not remember to have been great at the first. *Sub ferulâ*, however, and with encouragement, I so far advanced that he presently began to consider the promoting me to the place of usher, with a cane *in commendam*; and, doubtless, he would have done it but for a fit that took him at the first news of the Rye House Plot, and the danger His sacred Majesty had run thereby—which a friend imprudently brought to him when he was merry after dinner—and which caused an illness that at one and the same time

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carried him off and deprived me of the best of pedagogues.

After that, and learning that his successor had a son whom he proposed to promote to the place I desired, I returned to the school no more, but began to live at home; at first with pleasure, but after no long interval with growing chagrin and tedium. Our house possessed none of the comforts that are accessory to idleness, and therefore when the east wind drove me indoors from swinging on the gate, or sulking in the stack-yard, I found in it neither welcome nor occupation. My younger brother had seized on the place of assistant to my father, and having got thews and experience *ambulando*, found fresh ground every day for making mock of my uselessness. Did I milk, the cows kicked over the bucket while I thought of other things; did I plough, my furrows ran crooked; when I thrashed, the flail soon wearied my arms. In the result, therefore, the respect with which my father had at first regarded my learning wore off, and he grew to hate the sight of me whether I hung over the fire or loafed in the doorway, my sleeves too short for my chapped arms, and my breeches barely to my knees. Though my mother still believed in me, and occasionally, when she was in an ill-humour with my father, made me read to her, her support scarcely balanced the neighbours' sneers. Nor, when I chanced to displease her—which, to do her justice, was not often, for I was her favourite—was she above joining in the general cry, and asking me, while she cuffed me, whether I thought the cherries fell into the mouth, and meant to spend all my life with my hands in my pockets.

To make a long story short, at the end of twelve months, whereof every day of the last ten increased my hatred of our home surroundings, the dull strip of common before the door, the duck-pond, the grey horizon, and the twin ash-trees on which I had cut my name so often, I heard through a neighbour that an usher was required in a school at Ware. This was

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enough for me; while, of my family, who saw me leave with greater relief on their own account than hope on mine, only my mother felt or affected regret. With ten shillings in my pocket, her parting gift, and my scanty library of three volumes packed among my clothes on my back, I plodded the twelve miles to Ware, satisfied the learned Mr. D—— that I had had the small-pox, would sleep three in a bed, and knew more than he did; and the same day was duly engaged to teach in his classical seminary, in return for my board, lodging, washing, and nine guineas a year.

He had trailed a pike in the wars, and was an ignorant, but neither a cruel, nor, save in the pretence of knowledge, a dishonest man; it might be supposed, therefore, that, after the taste of idleness and dependence I had had, I should here find myself tolerably placed, and in the fair way of promotion. But I presently found that I had merely exchanged a desert for a prison, wherein I had not only the shepherding of the boys to do, both by night and day, which in a short time grew inconceivably irksome, so that I had to choose whether I would be tyrant or slave; but also the main weight of teaching, and there no choice at all but to be a drudge. And this without any alleviation from week's end to week's end, either at meals or at any other time! for my employer's wife had high notions, and must keep a separate house, though next door, and with communications; sitting down with us only on Sundays, and then at dinner, when woe betide the boy who gobbled his food or choked over the pudding-balls. Having satisfied herself on my first coming that my father was neither of the Quorum nor of Justice's kin, and, in fact, a mere rustic nobody, she had no more to say to me, but when she was not scolding her husband, addressed herself solely to one of the boys, who, by virtue of an uncle who was a canon, had his seat beside her. Insensibly, her husband, who at first, with an eye to my knowledge and his own deficiencies,

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had been more civil to me, took the same tone; and not only that, but, finding that I was to be trusted, he came less and less into school, until at last he would only appear for a few minutes in the day, and to carve when we had meat, and to see the lights extinguished at night. This without any added value for me; so that the better I served him—and for a year I managed his school for him—the less he favoured me, and at last thought a nod all the converse he owed me in the day.

Consigned to this solitary life by those above me, it was not likely that I should find compensation in the society of lads to whom I stood in an odious light, and of whom the oldest was no more than fourteen. For what was our life? Such hours as we did not spend in the drudgery of school, or in our beds, we passed in a yard on the dank side of the house, a grassless place, muddy in winter and dusty in summer, overshadowed by one skeleton tree; and wherein, since all violent games and sports were forbidden by the good lady's scruples (who belonged to the fanatical party) as savouring of Popery, we had perforce to occupy ourselves with bickerings and complaints and childish plays. Abutting on the garden of her house, this yard presented on its one open side a near prospect of water-butts and drying clothes, so that to this day I profess that I hold it in greater horror than any other place or thing at that school.

It is true we walked out in the country at rare intervals; but as three sides of the town were forbidden to us by a great man, whose property lay in that quarter, and who feared for his game, our excursions were always along one road, which afforded neither change nor variety. Moreover, I had a particular reason for liking these excursions as little as possible, which was that they exposed me to frequent meetings with gay young sparks of my own age, whose scornful looks as they rode by, with the contemptuous names they called after me, asking who dressed the boys' hair and the like, I found it

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difficult to support—even with the aid of those reflections on the dignity of learning and the Latin tongue which I had imbibed from my late master.

Be it remembered (in palliation of that which I shall presently tell) that at this time I was only eighteen, an age at which the passions and ambitions awake, and that this was my life. At a time when youth demands change and excitement and the fringe of ornament, my days and weeks went by in a plain round, as barren of wholesome interests as it was unadorned by any kindly aid or companionship. To rise, to teach, to use the cane, to move always in a dull atmosphere of routine; for diversion to pace the yard I have described, always with shrill quarrellings in my ears—these with the weekly walk made up my life at Ware, and must form my excuse. How the life came to an abrupt end, how I came to have sore need of the excuse, it is now my business to tell; but of these in the next chapter. Wherein also I propose to show, without any moralities, another thing that shall prove them to the purpose, namely, how these early experiences, which I have thus curtly described, led me *per viam dolorosam* to my late lord, and mingled my fortunes with his, under circumstances not unworthy of examination by those who take mankind for their study.

CHAPTER II

To begin, Mrs. D——, my master's better half, though she seldom condescended to our house, and when engaged in her kitchen premises affected to ignore the proximity of ours, enjoyed in Ware the reputation of a shrewd and capable housewife. Whether she owed this solely to the possession of a sharp temper and voluble voice, I cannot say; but only that during all the time I was there I scarcely passed an hour in our miserable playground without my ears being deafened and my brain irritated by

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the sound of her chiding. She had the advantage, when I first came to the school, of an elderly servant, who went about her work under an even flow of scolding, and, it may be, had become so accustomed to the infliction as to be neither the better nor worse for it. But about the time of which I am writing, when, as I have said, I had been there twelve months, I remarked a change in Mrs. D——'s voice; and judged from the increased acerbity and rising shrillness of her tone that she had passed from drilling an old servant to informing a new one. To confirm this theory, before long, "Lazy slut!" and "Dirty baggage!" and "Take that, Insolence," were the best of the terms I heard; and these so frequently mingled with blows and slaps, and at times with the sound of sobbing, that my gall rose. I had listened indifferently enough, and, if with irritation, without pain, to the chiding of the old servant; and I knew no more of this one. But by the instinct which draws youth to youth, or by reason of Mrs. D——'s increased severity, I began to feel for her, to pity her, and at last to wonder what she was like, and her age, and so forth.

Nothing more formidable than a low paling separated the garden of Mrs. D——'s house from our yard; but that her eyes might not be offended by the ignoble sight of the trade by which she lived, four great water-butts were ranked along the fence, which being as tall as a man, and nicely arranged, and strengthened on the inner side by an accumulation of rubbish and so forth, formed a pretty effective screen. The boys indeed had their spy-holes, and were in the habit of peeping when I did not check them; but in only one place, at the corner farthest from the house, was it possible to see by accident, as it were, and without stooping or manifest prying, a small patch of the garden. This gap in the corner I had hitherto shunned, for Mrs. D—— had more than once sent me from it with a flea in my ear and hot cheeks; now, however, it became a favourite

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with me, and as far as I could, without courting the notice of the wretched urchins who whined and squabbled round me, I began to frequent it; sometimes leaning against the abutting fence with my back to the house, as in a fit of abstraction, and then slowly turning—when I did not fail to rake the aforesaid patch with my eyes; and sometimes taking that corner for the limit of a brisk walk to and fro, which made it natural to pause and wheel at that point.

Notwithstanding these ruses, however, and though Mrs. D——'s voice, raised in anger, frequently bore witness to her neighbourhood, it was some time before I caught a glimpse of the person whose fate, more doleful than mine, yet not dissimilar, had awakened my interest. At length I espied her, slowly crossing the garden, with her back to me and a yoke on her shoulders. Two pails hung from the yoke. I smelled swill; and in a trice, seeing in her no more than a wretched drab, in clogs and a coarse sacking apron, I felt my philanthropy brought to the test; and without a second glance turned away in disgust. And thought no more of her.

After that I took a distaste for the gap, and I do not remember that I visited it for a week or more; when, at length, chance or custom taking me there again, I saw the same woman hanging clothes on the line. She had her back to me as on the former occasion; but this time I lingered watching her, and whether she knew or not that I was there, her work presently brought her towards the place in the fence beside the water-barrels, at which I stood gazing. Still, I could not see her face, in part because she did not turn my way, and more because she wore a dirty limp sun-bonnet, which obscured her features. But I continued to watch; and by and bye she had finished her hanging, and took up the empty basket to go in again; and thereon suddenly, in the act of rising from stooping, she looked directly at me, not being more than two, or at the most three, paces

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from me. It was but one look, and it lasted, I suppose, two seconds or so; but it touched something in me that had never been touched before, and to this time of writing, and though I have been long married and have children, my body burns at the remembrance of it. For not only was the face that for those two seconds looked into mine a face of rare beauty, brown and low-browed, with scarlet, laughing lips, and milk-white teeth, and eyes brighter than a queen's jewels; but in the look, short as it was and passing, shone a something that I had never seen in a face before, a something, God knows what, appeal or passion or temptation, that on the instant fired my blood. I suppose, nay, I know now, that the face that flashed that look at me from under the dirty sun-bonnet could change to a marvel; and in a minute, and as by a miracle, become dull and almost ugly, or the most beautiful in the world. But then, that and all such things were new to me who knew no women, and had never spoken to a woman in the way of love, nor thought of one when her back was turned; so new, that when it was over and she gone without a second glance, I went back to the house another man, my heart thumping in my breast, and my cheeks burning, and my whole being oppressed with desire and bashfulness and wonder and curiosity, and a hundred other emotions that would not permit me to be at ease until I had hidden myself from all eyes.

Well, to be brief, that, in less than the time I have taken to tell it, changed all. I was eighteen; the girl's shining eyes burned me up, as flame burns stubble. In an hour, a week, a day, I can no more say within what time than I can describe what befell me before I was born—for if that was a sleeping, this was a dream, and passed swift and confused as one—I was madly and desperately in love. Her face, brilliant, mischievous, alluring, rose before the thumbed grammar by day, and the dim casement of the fetid, crowded bedroom by night, and filled

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the slow, grey dawns, now with joy and now with despair. For the time I thought only of her, lived for her, did my work in dreams of her. I kept no count of time, I gave no heed to what passed round me; but I went through the routine of my miserable life, happy as the slave that, rich in the possession of some beneficent drug, defies the pains of labour and the lash. I say my miserable life; but I say it, so great was the change, in a figure only and in retrospect. Mrs. D—— might scorn me now, and the boys squabble round me, yet that life was no longer miserable nor dull, whereof every morning flattered me with hopes of seeing my mistress, and every third day or so fulfilled the promise.

With all this, and though from the moment her eyes met mine across the fence, her beauty possessed me utterly, a full fortnight elapsed before I spoke with her. In the interval I saw her three times, and always in the wretched guise in which she had first appeared to me; which, so far from checking my passion, now augmented it by the full measure of the mystery with which the sordidness of her dress, in contrast with her beauty, invested her in my mind. But, for speaking with her, that was another matter, and one presenting so many difficulties (whereof, as the boys' constant presence and Mrs. D——'s temper were the greatest, so my bashfulness was not the least) that I think we might have gone another fortnight, and perhaps a third to that, and not come to it, had not a certain privilege on which Mr. D——'s wife greatly prided herself, come to our aid in the nick of time; and by bringing us into the same room (a thing which had never occurred before, and of itself threw me into a fever) combined with fortune to aid my hopes.

This privilege—so Mrs. D—— invariably styled it—was the solemn gathering of the household on one Sunday in each month to listen to a discourse which, her husband sitting meekly by, she read to us from the works of an Independent divine. On

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these occasions she delivered herself so sonorously and with so much gusto, that I do not doubt she found compensation in them for the tedium of the sermon on Passive Obedience, or the fate of the Amalekite, to which, in compliance with the laws against Dissent, she had perforce listened earlier in the day. The master and mistress and the servant sat on one side of the room, I with the boys on the other; and hitherto I am unable to say which of us had suffered most under the infliction. But the appearance of my sweet martyr—so, when madam's voice rang shrillest and most angrily over the soap-suds, I had come to think of her—in a place behind her master and mistress (being the same in which the old servant had nodded and grunted every sermon evening since my coming), put a new complexion on the matter. For her, she entered as if unconscious of my presence; and took her seat with downcast eyes and hands folded, and that dull look on her face which, when she chose, veiled three-fourths of its beauty. But my ears flamed, and the blood surged to my head; and I thought that all must read my secret in my face.

With Mrs. D——, however, this was the one hour in the month when the suspicions natural to her carping temper slept, and she tasted a pleasure comparatively pure. Majestically arrayed in a huge pair of spectacles—which on this occasion, and in the character of the family priest, her vanity permitted, and even incited her to wear—and provided with a couple of tall tallow candles, which it was her husband's duty to snuff, she would open the dreaded quarto and prop it firmly on the table before her. Then, after giving out her text in a tone that need not have disgraced Hugh Peters, it was her custom to lift her eyes and look round to assure herself that all was cringing attention; and this was the trying moment; woe to the boy whose gaze wandered—his back would smart for it before he slept. These preliminaries at an end, however, and the discourse

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begun, the danger was over for the time; for, in the voluptuous roll of the long wordy sentences, and the elections and damnations and free wills that plentifully bestrewed them, she speedily forgot all but the sound of her own voice; and, nothing occurring to rouse her, might be trusted to read for the hour and half with pleasure to herself and without risk to others.

So it fell out on this occasion. As soon, therefore, as the steady droning of her voice gave me courage to look up, I had before me the scene with which a dozen Sunday evenings had made me familiar; the dull circle of yellow light; within it madam's horn-rimmed glasses shining over the book, while her finger industriously followed the lines; a little behind, her husband, nodding and recovering himself by turns. Not now was this all, however, now I saw also, and *imprimis*, a dim oval face, framed in the background behind the two old people; that, now in shadow now in light, gleamed before my fascinated eyes with unearthly beauty. Once or twice, fearing to be observed, I averted my gaze and looked elsewhere; guiltily and with hot temples. But always I returned to it again. And always the longer I let my eyes dwell on the vision—for a vision it seemed in the halo of the candles—and the more monotonous hung the silence, broken only by Mrs. D——'s even drone, the more distinctly the beautiful face stood out, and the more bewitching and alluring appeared the red lips and smiling eyes and dark clustering hair, that moment by moment drew my heart from me, and kindled my ripening brain and filled my veins with fever!

"Seventhly, and under this head, of the sin of David!"

So Mrs. D—— booming on, in her deep voice, to all seeming endlessly; while the air of the dingy white-washed room grew stale, and the candles guttered and burned low, and the boys, poor little wretches, leaned on one another's shoulders and

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sighed, and it was difficult to say whether Mr. D——'s noddings or his recoveries went nearer to breaking his neck. At last—or was it only my fancy?—I thought I made out a small brown hand gliding within the circle of light. Then—or was I dreaming?—one of the candles began to move; but to move so little and so stealthily, that I could not swear to it; nor ever could have sworn, if Mr. D——'s wig had not a moment later taken fire with a light flame, and a stench, and a frizzling sound, that in a second brought him, still half asleep, but swearing, to his feet.

Mrs. D——, her mouth open, and the volume lifted, halted in the middle of a word, and glared as if she had been shot; her surprise at the interruption so great—and no wonder—that she could not for a while find words. But the stream of her indignation, so checked, only gathered volume; and in a few seconds broke forth.

"Mr. D——!" she cried, slamming the book down on the table. "You disgusting beast! Do you know that the boys are here?"

"My wig is on fire!" he cried for answer. He had taken it off, and now held it at arm's length, looking at it so ruefully that the boys, though they knew the danger, could scarcely restrain their laughter.

"And serve you right for a weak-kneed member!" his wife answered in a voice that made us quake. "If you had not guzzled at dinner, sir, and swilled small beer, you would have remained awake instead of spoiling a good wig, and staining your soul! Ay, and causing these little ones——"

"I never closed my eyes!" he declared, roundly.

"Rubbish!" she answered in a tone that would brook no denial. And then, "Give the wig to Jennie, sir!" she continued, peremptorily. "And put your handkerchief on your head. It is well that good Mr. Nesbit does not know what language has been used during his discourse; it would cut that excellent man to the heart. Do you hear, sir?—give the wig to Jennie," she screamed. "A handkerchief is good

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enough for profane swearers and filthy talkers ! And too good ! Too good, sir ! ”

He went reluctantly to obey, seeing nothing for it ; but between his anger and Jennie's clumsiness, the wig, in passing from one to the other, fell under the table. This caused Mrs. D——, who was at the end of her patience, to spring up in a rage, and down went a candle. Nor was this the worst ; for the grease in its fall cast a trail of hot drops on her Sunday gown, and in a flash she was on the maid and had smacked her face till the room rang.

“ Take that, and that, you clumsy baggage ! ” she cried in a fury, her face crimson. “ And that ! And the next time you offer to take a gentleman's wig, have better manners. This will cost you a year's wages, my fine madam ! And let me hear of your stepping over the doorstep until it is earned, and I will have you jailed and whipped. Do you hear ? And you,” she continued, turning ferociously on her husband, “ swearing on the Lord's day like a drunken, raffling, God-forsaken Tantivy ! You are not much better ! ”

It only remains in my memory now as a coarse outburst of vixenish temper, made prominent by after events. But what I felt at the moment I should in vain try to describe. At one time I was on the point of springing on the woman, and at another all but caught the sobbing girl in my arms and challenged the world to touch her. Fortunately, Mr. D——, now fully awakened, and the more inclined to remember decency in proportion as his wife forgot it, recalled me to myself by sternly bidding me see the boys to their beds.

Glad to escape, they needed no second order, but flocked to the door, and I with them. In our retreat, it was necessary for me to pass close to the shrinking girl, whom Mrs. D—— was still abusing with all the cruelty imaginable ; as I did so I heard, or dreamed that I heard, three words, breathed in the faintest possible whisper. I say, dreamed I heard, for the

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girl neither looked at me nor removed the apron from her face, nor by abating her sobs or any other sign betrayed that she spoke or that she was conscious of my neighbourhood.

Yet the three words, "Garden, ten minutes," so gently breathed that I doubted while I heard, could only have come from her; and assured of that, it will be believed that I found the ten minutes I spent seeing the boys to bed by the light of one scanty rushlight the longest and most tumultuous I ever passed.

If she had not spoken I should have found it a sorry time, indeed; since the moment the door was closed behind me I discerned a hundred reasons to be dissatisfied with my conduct, thought of a hundred things I should have said, and saw a hundred things I should have done; and stood a coward convicted. Now, however, all was not over; I might explain. I was about to see her, to speak with her, to pour out my indignation and pity, perhaps to touch her hand; and in the delicious throb of fear and hope and excitement with which these anticipations filled my breast, I speedily forgot to regret what was past.

CHAPTER III

DOUBTLESS there have been men able to boast, and with truth, that they carried to their first assignation with a woman an even pulse. But as I do not presume to rank myself among these, who have been commonly men of high station (of whom my late Lord Rochester was, I believe, the chief in my time), neither—the unhappy occurrence which I am in the way to relate, notwithstanding—have I, if I may say so without disrespect, so little heart as to crave the reputation. In truth, I experienced that evening, as I crept out of the back-door of Mr. D——'s house, and stole into the gloom of the whispering garden, a full share of the guilty feeling that goes

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with secrecy; and more than my share of the agitation of spirit natural in one who knows (and is new to the thought) that under cover of the darkness a woman stands trembling and waiting for him. A few paces from the house—which I could leave without difficulty, though at the risk of detection—I glanced back to assure myself that all was still; then shivering, as much with excitement as at the chill greeting the night air gave me, I hastened to the gap in the fence, through which I had before seen my mistress.

I felt for the gap with my hand and peered through it, and called her name softly—"Jennie! Jennie!" and listened; and after an interval called again more boldly. Still hearing nothing, I discovered by the sinking at my heart—which was such that, for all my eighteen years, I could have sat down and cried—how much I had built on her coming. And I called again and again; and still got no answer.

Yet I did not despair. Mrs. D—— might have kept her, or one of a hundred things might have happened to delay her; from one cause or another she might not have been able to slip out as quickly as she had thought. She might come yet; and so, though the more prolonged my absence the greater the risk of detection, I composed myself to wait with what patience I might. The town was quiet; human noise at an end for the day; but Mr. D——'s school stood on the outskirts, with its back to the open country, and between the sighing of the wind among the poplars, and the murmur of a neighbouring brook, and those far-off noises that seem inseparable from the night, I had stood a minute or more before another sound, differing from all these, and having its origin at a spot much nearer to me, caught my ear, and set my heart beating. It was the noise of a woman weeping; and to this day I do not know precisely what I did on hearing it—when I made out what it was, I mean—or how I found courage to do it; only, that in an instant, as it seemed to me,

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I was on the other side of the fence, and had taken the girl in my arms, with her head on my shoulder, and her wet eyes looking into mine, while I rained kisses on her face.

Doubtless the darkness and her grief and my passion gave me boldness to do this; and to do a hundred other mad things in my ecstasy. For, as I had never spoken to her before, any more than I had ever held a woman in my arms before, so I had not thought, I had not dreamed of this! of her hand, perhaps, but no more. Therefore, and though since Adam's time the stars have looked down on many a lover's raptures, never, I verily believe, have they gazed on transports so perfect, so unlooked for, as were mine at that moment! And all the time not a word passed between us; but after a while she pushed me from her, with a kind of force that would not be resisted, and, holding me at arm's length, looked at me strangely; and then thrusting me altogether from her, she bade me, almost roughly, go back.

"What—and leave you?" I cried, astonished and heart-broken.

"No, sir, but go to the other side of the fence," she answered firmly, drying her eyes and recovering something of her usual calmness. "And more, if you love me as you say you do——"

I protested. "*If?*" I cried. "If! And what then—if I do?"

"You will learn to obey," she answered, coolly, yet with an archness that transported me anew. "I am not one of your boys."

For that word, I would have caught her in my arms again, but with a power that I presently came to know, and whereof that was the first exercise, she waved me back. "Go!" she said, masterfully. "For this time, go. Do you hear me?"

My boldness of a minute before notwithstanding, I stood in awe of her, and was easily cowed; and I crossed the fence. When I was on my side, she came

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to the gap, and rewarded me by giving me her hand to kiss. "Understand me," she said. "You are to come to this side, sir, only when I give you leave."

"Oh," I cried. "Can you be so cruel?"

"Or, not at all, if you prefer it," she continued, drily. "More, you must go in now; or I shall be missed and beaten. You do not want that to happen, I suppose?"

"If that hag touches you again!" I cried, boiling with rage at the thought, "I will—I will——"

"What?" she said, softly, and her fingers closed on mine, and sent a thrill to my heart.

"I will strangle her!" I cried.

She laughed, a little cruelly. "Fine words," she said.

"But I mean them," I answered, passionately. And I swore it—I swore it; what will not a boy in love promise?

"Well," she answered, whispering and leaning forward until her breath fanned my cheek, and the intoxicating scent of her hair stole away my senses, "perhaps some day I shall try you. Are you sure that you will not fail me then?"

I swore it, panting, and tried to draw her towards me by her arm; but she held back, laughing softly and as one well pleased; and then, in a moment, snatching her hand from me, she vanished in the darkness of the garden, leaving me in a seventh heaven of delight, my blood fired by her kisses, my fancy dwelling on her beauty; and without one afterthought.

Doubtless had I been less deep in love (wherein I was far over-head), or deeper in experience, I might have noted it for a curious thing that she should be so quickly comforted; and should be able to rise in a few moments, and at the touch of my lips, from passionate despair to perfect control, both of herself and of me. And starting thence, I might have gone on to suspect that she possessed her full share of the *finesse* which is always a woman's shield and some-

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times her sword. But as such suspicions are foreign to youth, so are they especially foreign to youthful love, which takes nothing lower than perfection for its idol. And this I can say for certain, that they no more entered my brain than did the consequences which were to flow from my passion.

For the time, indeed, I was in an ecstasy, a rapture, walking a-tiptoe, and troubled by none of the things that trouble common folk; so that to this day—though long married—I look back to that period of innocent folly with a yearning and a regret, the sorer for this, that when I try to analyse the happiness I enjoyed, I fail, and make nothing of it. That all things should be changed for me, and I be changed in my own eyes—so that I walked a head taller and esteemed myself ridiculously—by the fact that a kitchen wench in a drugged petticoat and clogs had let me kiss her, and left me to believe that she loved me, seems incredible now; as incredible as that a daily glimpse of her figure flitting among the water-butts and powdering-tubs had power to transform that miserable back garden into a paradise, and Mr. D——’s school, with its dumplings, and bread and dripping, and inky fingers, into a mansion of tremulous joy!

Yet it was so. Nor did it matter anything to me so great is the power of love when one is young, that my mistress went in rags, and had coarse hands, and spoke rustically. Touching this last, indeed, I must do her the justice to say that from the first she was as quick to note differences of speech and manner as she was apt to imitate good exemplars; and, moreover, possessed under her rags a species of refinement that matched the witchery of her face, and proved her to be, as she presently showed herself, no common girl.

Of course I, in the state of happy delirium on which I had now entered, and wherein even Mr. D—— and the boys wore an amiable air, and only Mrs. D——, because she persecuted my love, had the semblance of a female Satan, needed no proof of this;

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or I had had it when my Dorinda—so I christened her, feeling Jennie too low a name for so much beauty and kindness—proposed at our second rendezvous that I should teach her to read. At the first flush of the proposal I found reading a poor thing because she did not possess it; at the second I adored her for the humility that condescended to learn; but at the third I saw the convenience, as well as sense, of a proposal which was as much above the mind of an ordinary maid in love as Dorinda appeared superior to such a creature in all the qualities that render sense amiable.

Yet this much granted, how to teach her, seeing that we seldom met or conversed, and never, save under the kindly shelter of darkness? The obstacle for a time taxed all my ingenuity, but in the end I surmounted it by boldly asking Mr. D——'s leave to hold the afternoon classes in the playground. This, the approach of warm weather giving colour to the petition, was allowed; after which, as Dorinda was engaged in the back premises at that hour, and could listen while she drudged, the rest was easy. Calling up the lowest class, I would find fault with their reading, and after flying out at them in a simulated passion, would remit them again and again to the elements; so that for a fortnight or more, and, indeed, until the noise of the lads repeating the lesson annoyed Mrs. D——'s ears, the playground rang with a-b, ab; e-b, eb; c-a-t, cat; d-o-g, dog, and the like, with the alphabet and the rest of the horn-book. And all this so frequently repeated, that with this assistance, and the help of a spelling-book which I gave her, and which she studied before others awoke, my mistress at the end of two months could read tolerably, and was beginning to essay easy round-hand.

And Heaven knows how delicious were those lessons under the shabby ragged tree that shaded one half of the yard! I spoke to the yawning, grubby-fingered boys, who slouched and straddled round me; but I knew to whose ears I applied myself;

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nor had pupil ever a more diligent master, or master an apter pupil. Once a week I had my fee of kisses, but rarely, very rarely, was permitted to cross the fence; a reserve on my Dorinda's part that, while it augmented the esteem in which I held her, maintained my passion at a white heat. When, nevertheless, I remonstrated with her, and loverlike, complained of the rigour which in my heart I commended, she chid me for setting a low value on her; and when I persisted, "Go on," she said, drawing away from me with a wonderful air of offence. "Tell me at once, and in so many words, that you think me a low thing! That you really take me for the kitchen drudge I appear!"

Her tone was full of meaning, with a hint of mystery, but as I had never thought her aught else—and yet an angel—I was dumb.

"You did think me that?" she cried, fixing me with her eyes, and speaking in a tone that demanded an answer.

I muttered that I had never heard, had never known, that—that—and so stammered into silence, not at all understanding her.

"Then I think that hitherto we have been under a mistake," she answered, speaking very distantly, and in a voice that sent my heart into my boots. "You were fond—or said you were—of the cook-maid. She does not exist. No, sir, a little farther away, if you please," my mistress continued, haughtily, her head in the air, "and know that I come of better stock than that. If you would have my story, I will tell it you. I can remember—it is almost the first thing I can remember—a day when I played, as a little child, with a necklace of gold beads, in the court-yard of a house in a great city; and wandered out, the side-gate being open, and the porter not in his seat, into the streets; where," she continued, dreamily, and gazing away from me, "there were great crowds, and men firing guns, and people running every way——"

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I uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

She noticed it only by making a short pause, and then went on in the same thoughtful tone, "As far as I can remember, it was a place where there were booths and stalls crowded together, and among them, it seems to me, a man who was being hunted, who ran first one way and then another, while soldiers shot at him. At last he came where I had dropped on the ground in terror, after running child-like where the danger was greatest. He glared at me an instant—he was running, stooping down below the level of the booths, and they had lost him for the time; then he snatched me up in his arms, and darted from his shelter, crying loudly as he held me up, 'Save the child! Save the child!' The crowd raised the same cry, and made a way for him to pass. And then—I do not remember anything, until I found myself shabbily dressed in a little inn, where, I suppose, the man, having made his escape, left me."

CHAPTER IV

At that I remember that I cried out in overwhelming excitement and amazement; cried out that I knew the man and his story, and the place whence she had been taken; that I had heard the tale from my father years before. "It was Colonel Porter who picked you up—Colonel Porter, and he saved his life by it," I cried, quite beside myself at the wonderful discovery I had made. "It was Colonel Porter, in the great riot at Norwich."

"Ah!" she said, slowly, looking away from me, and speaking so coolly and strangely as both to surprise and damp me.

Yet I persisted. "Yes," I said, "the story is well known; at least that part of it. But——" and there and at that word I stopped, dumbfounded and gaping.

"But what?" she asked sharply, and looked at me again; the colour risen in her face.

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"But—you are only eighteen," I hazarded, timidly, "and the Norwich Riot was in the war time. I dare say thirty years ago."

She turned on me in a sort of passion.

"Well, sir, and what of that?" she cried. "Do you think me thirty?"

"No, indeed," I answered. And at the most she was nineteen.

"Then don't you believe me?"

I cried out too at that; but, boy-like, I was so proud of my knowledge and acuteness that I could not let the point lie. "All I mean," I explained, "is that to have been alive then, and at Norwich, you must be thirty now. And——"

"And was it I," she answered, flying out at me in a fine fury, "who said anything about Norwich? Or your dirty riots? Or your Porter, whose name I never heard before? Go away! I hate you!" she continued, passionately, waving me off. "You make up things and then put them on me. I never said a word about Norwich."

"I know you did not," I protested.

"Then why did you say I did?" she wailed. "Why did you say I did? You are a wretch! I hate you!"

And with that, dissolving in tears and sobs, she at one and the same time showed me another side of love, and reduced me to the utmost depths of despair; whence I was not permitted to emerge, nor reinstated in the least degree of favour until I had a hundred times abased myself before her, and was ready to curse the day when I first heard the name of Porter. Still peace was at last, and with infinite difficulty, restored; and so complete was our *redintegratio amoris* that we presently ventured to recur to her tale and to the strange coincidence that had divided us; which did not seem so very remarkable, on second thoughts, seeing that she could not now remember that she had said a word about booths or stalls, but would have it I had inserted those particulars; the man in her case

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having taken refuge—she fancied, but could not at this distance of time remember very clearly—among the seats of a kind of bull-ring or circus erected in the market-place. Which of course made a good deal of difference.

Notwithstanding this discrepancy, however, and though, taught by experience, I hastened to agree with her that the secret of her birth was not likely to be discovered in a moment, nor by so simple a process as the journey to Norwich, which I had been going to suggest, it was natural that we should often revert to the subject and to her pretensions, and the hardship of her lot; and my curiosity and questions giving a fillip to her memory, scarcely a day passed but she recovered some new detail from the past; as at one time a service of gold plate which she perfectly remembered she had seen on her father's sideboard; and at another time an accident that had befallen her in her childhood, through her father's coach and six horses being overturned in a slough. Such particulars (and many others as pertinent and romantic, on which I will not linger) gave us a certainty of her past consequence and her future fortune were her parents once known; and while they served to augment the respect in which my love held her, gradually and almost imperceptibly led her to take a higher tone with me, and even on occasions to carry herself towards me with an air of mystery, as if there were still some things which she had not confided to me.

This attitude on her part—which in itself pained me extremely—and still more the fear naturally arising from it, that if she came by her own I should immediately lose her, forced me to make the acquaintance of yet another side of love; by throwing me, I mean, into such a fever of suspicion and jealousy as made me for a period the most unhappy of men. From this plight my mistress, exercising the privilege of her sex, made no haste to relieve me. On the contrary, by affecting an increased reserve and asserting that her movements were watched, she prolonged my

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doubts; nor when this treatment had wrought the desired end of reducing me to the lowest depths, and she at length consented to meet me, did she entirely relent or abandon her reserve; or if she did so, on rare occasions, it was only to set me some task as the price of her complaisance, or expose me to some trial by which she might prove my devotion.

In a word, while I became hopelessly enslaved, even to the flogging a boy at her word, or procuring a dress far above my station—merely that she might see me by stealth in it, and judge of my air!—which were two of her caprices, she appeared to be farther removed from me every day, and at each meeting granted me fewer privileges. Whether this treatment had its origin in the natural instinct of a woman, or was deliberately chosen as better calculated to increase my subservience, it had the latter effect; and to such an extent that when, after a long absence, she condescended to meet me, and broached a plan that earlier would have raised my hair, I asked no better than to do her bidding, and, instead of pointing out the folly of her proposal, fell in with it with scarcely a murmur.

Her plan, when she communicated it to me, which she did with an air of mystery and the same assumption of a secret withheld that had tormented me before, amounted to nothing less than an evening sally into the town on the occasion of the approaching visit of the Duke of York; who was to lie one night at the "Rose" at Ware on his way to Newmarket. Mr. D—— had issued the strictest orders that all should keep the house during this visit; not so much out of a proper care for the boys' morality (though the gay crowd that followed the Court served for a pretext) as because, in his character of fanatic and Exclusionist, he held his highness's religion and person in equal abhorrence. Such a restriction weighed little in the scale against love; but, infatuated as I was, I found something that sensibly shocked me in the proposal coming from Dorinda's lips; nor

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could I fail to foresee many dangers to which a young girl must expose herself on such an expedition in the town, and at night. But as to a youth in love nothing that his mistress chooses to do seems long amiss, so this proposal scared me for a moment only; after which it cost my mistress no more than a little rallying on my crop-eared manners, and some scolding, to make me see it in its true aspect of an innocent frolic, fraught with as much pleasure to the cavalier as novelty to the escorted.

"You will don your new suit," she said, merrily, "and I shall meet you in the garden at half-past nine."

"And if the boys miss me?" I protested, feebly.

"The boys have missed you before," she answered, mocking my tone. "Were you not here last night? And for a whole hour, sir?"

I confessed with hot cheeks that I had been there; humbly and tamely awaiting her pleasure.

"And did they tell then?" she asked, scornfully. "Or are they less afraid of the birch now? But, of course—if you don't care to come with me—or are afraid, sir——"

"I am neither," I said warmly. "Only I do not quite understand, sweet, what you wish."

"They lie at the 'Rose,'" she said. "And amongst them, I am told, are the prettiest men and the most lovely women in the world. And jewels, and laces, and such dresses! Oh, I am mad to see them! And music and gaming and dancing! And dishes and plates of gold! And a Popish priest, which is a thing I have never seen, though I have heard of it. And——"

"And do you expect to see all these things through the windows?" I cried in my superior knowledge.

She did not answer at once, but with her hands on my shoulders swayed to and fro sideways as if she already heard the music; while her gipsy face looked archly into mine, first on this side and then on that, and her hair swung to and fro on her shoulders in a

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beautiful abandonment which I found it impossible to resist. At last she stopped, and, "Yes," she said, demurely, "through the windows, Master Richard Longface! Do you meet me here at half-past nine—in your new suit, sir—and you shall see them too—through the windows."

After that, though I made a last effort to dissuade her, there was nothing more to be said. Obedient to her behest, I made my preparations, and at the appointed hour next evening rose softly from the miserable pallet on which I had just lain down; and dressing myself with shaking fingers and in the dark—that my bedfellows might know as little as possible of my movements—I stole down the stairs and into the garden.

Here I found myself first at the rendezvous. The night was dark, but an unusual light hung over the town, and the wind that stirred the poplars brought scraps and sounds of music to the ear. I had some time to wait, and time too to think what I was about to do; to weigh the chances of detection and dismissal, and even to taste the qualms that rawness and timidity mingled with my anticipations of pleasure. But, though I had my fears, no vision of the real future obtruded itself on my mind as I stood there listening; nor any forewarning of the plunge I was about to take. And before I had come to the end of my patience Dorinda stood beside me.

Dark as it was, I fancied that I discerned something strange in her appearance, and I would have investigated it; but she whispered that we were late, and evading as well my questions as the caress I offered, she bade me help her as quickly as I could over the fence. I did so, we crossed a neighbouring garden, and in a twinkling and with the least possible difficulty stood in the road. Here the strains of music came more plainly to the ear, and the glare of light hung lower and shone more brightly. This seemed enough for my mistress; she turned that way without hesitation, and set forward, the outskirts of the town

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being quickly passed. Between the late hour and the flux of people towards the centre of interest, the streets were vacant; and we met no one until we reached the main thoroughfare, and came upon the edge of the great crowd that moved to and fro before the "Rose Inn." Here all the windows, in one of which a band of music was playing some new air, were brilliantly lighted; while below and round the door was such a throng of hurrying waiters and drawers, and such a carrying of meals and drinks, and a shouting of orders as almost turned the brain. A carriage and six that had just set down a grandee, come to pay his *devoirs* to the prince, was moving off as we came up, the horses smoking, the footmen panting, and the postilions stooping in their saddles. A little to one side a cask was being staved for the troopers who had come with the duke; and on all the noisy, moving scene and the flags that streamed from the roofs and windows, and the shifting crowd, poured the ruddy light of a great *bon-feu* that burned on the farther side of the way.

Nor, rare as were these things, were they the most pertinent or the strangest that the fire revealed to me. I had come for nothing else but to see, *clam et furtim*, as the classics say, what was to be seen; with no thought of passing beyond the uttermost ring of spectators. But as I hung back shamefacedly my companion seized my wrist and drew me on; and when I turned to her to remonstrate, as Heaven lives, I did not know her! I conceived for a moment that some madam of the Court had seized me in a frolic; nor for a perceptible space could I imagine that the fine cloaked lady, whose eyes shone bright as stars through the holes in her mask, and whose raven hair, so cunningly dressed, failed to hide the brilliance of her neck, where the cloak fell loose, was my Dorinda, my mistress, the cook-maid whom I had kissed in the garden! Honestly, for an instant, I recoiled and hung back, afraid of her; nor was I quite assured of the truth, so unprepared was I for

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the change, until she whispered me sharply to come on.

"Whither?" I said, still hanging back in dismay. The bystanders were beginning to turn and stare, and in a moment would have jeered us.

"Within doors," she urged.

"They will not admit us."

"They will admit me," she answered, proudly, and made as if she would throw my hand from her.

Still I did not believe her, and it was that, and that only, that emboldened me; though, to be sure, I was in love and her slave. Reluctantly, and almost sulkily, I gave way, and sneaked behind her to the door. A man who stood on the steps seemed, at the first glance, minded to stop her; but, looking again, smiled and let us pass; and in a twinkling we stood in the hall among hurrying waiters, and shouting call-boys, and bloods in silk coats, whose scabbards rang as they came down the stairs, and a fair turmoil of pages, and footboys, and gentlemen, and gentlemen's gentlemen.

In such a company, elbowed this way and that by my betters, I knew neither how to carry myself nor where to look; but Dorinda, with barely a pause, and as if she knew the house, thrust open the nearest door, and led the way into a great room that stood on the right of the hall.

Here, down the spacious floor, and lighted by shaded candles, were ranged several tables, at which a number of persons had seats, while others stood or moved about the room. The majority of those present were men. I noticed, however, three or four women masked after the fashion of my companion, but more gorgeously dressed; and in my simplicity did not doubt that these were duchesses, the more as they talked, and laughed loudly; whereas the general company—save those who sat at one table where the game was at a standstill, and all were crying for a tallier—spoke low, the rattle of dice and chink of coin, and an occasional oath, taking the place of conversation. I saw piles of guineas and half-guineas

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on the tables, and gold lace on the men's coats, and the women a dream of silks and furbelows, and gleaming shoulders and flashing eyes; and between awe of my company, and horror at finding myself in such a place, I took all for real that glittered. Where, therefore, a man of experience would have discerned a crowd of dubious rakes and rustic squires tempting fortune for the benefit of the Groom-Porter, whose privilege was ambulatory, I fancied I gazed on earls and barons; saw a garter on every leg, and, blind to the stained walls of the common inn-room, supplied every bully who cried the main or called the trumps with the pedigree of a Howard.

This was a delusion not unnatural, and a prey to it, I expected each moment to be my last in that company. But the fringe of spectators that stood behind the players favouring us, we fell easily into line at one of the tables, and nothing happening, and no one saying us nay, I presently breathed more freely. I could see that my companion's beauty, though hidden in the main by her mask, was the subject of general remark; and that it drew on her looks and regards more or less insolent. But as she took no heed of these, but on the contrary gazed about her unmoved and with indifference, I hoped for the best; and excited by the brilliance and movement of a scene so far above my wildest dreams, that I already anticipated the pride with which I should hereafter describe it, I began to draw a fearful joy from our escapade. Like Æneas and Ulysses, I had seen men and cities! And stood among heroes! And seen the sirens! To which thoughts I was proceeding to add others equally classical, when a gentleman behind me diverted my thoughts by touching my companion on the arm, and very politely requesting her to lay on the table a guinea which he handed to her.

She did so, and he thanked her with a low-spoken compliment; then added with bent head, but bold eyes, "Fortune, my pretty lady, cannot surely have been unkind to one so fair."

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"I do not play," Dorinda answered, with all the bluntness I could desire.

"And yet I think I have seen you play," he replied. And affecting to be engaged in identifying her, he let his eyes rove over her figure.

Doubtless Dorinda's mask gave her courage; yet, even this taken into the count, her wit and resource astonished me. "You do not know me, my pretty gentleman," she said, coolly, and with a proud air.

"I know that you have cost me a guinea," he answered. "See, they have swept it off. And as I staked it for nothing else but to have an excuse to address the handsomest woman in the room——"

"You do not know what I am—behind my mask," she retorted.

"No," he replied, hardily, "and therefore I am going—I am going——"

"So am I," my mistress answered, with a quickness that both surprised and delighted me. "Good-night, good spendthrift! You are going, and I am going."

"Well hit!" he replied, with a grin. "And well content if we go together! Yet I think I know how I could keep you."

"Yes?" she said, indifferently.

"By deserving the name," he answered. "You called me spendthrift."

On that I do not know whether she thought him too forward, or saw that I was nearly at the end of my patience—which it may be imagined was no little tried by this badinage—but she turned her shoulder to him outright, and spoke a word to me in a low tone. Then: "Give me a guinea, Dick!" she said, pretty loudly. "I think I'll play."

CHAPTER V

SHE spoke confidently and with a grand air, knowing that I had brought a guinea with me; so that I had neither heart to shame her nor the courage to displease her. Though it was the ninth part of

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my income therefore, and it seemed to me sheer madness or worse to stake such a sum on a single card, and win or lose it in a moment, I lugged it out and gave it to her. Even then, knowing her to have no more skill in the game than I had, I was at a stand, wondering what she would do with it; but with the tact which never fails a woman she laid it where the gentleman had placed his. With better luck; for in a twinkling, and before I thought it well begun, the deal was over, the players sat back, and swore, and the banker, giving and taking here and there, thrust a guinea over to our guinea. I was in a sweat to take both up before anyone cheated us; but she nudged me, and said with her finest air, "Let it lie, Dick! Do you hear? Let it lie."

This was almost more than I could bear, to see fortune in my grasp, and not shut my hand upon it, but she was mistress and I let it lie; and in a moment, hey presto, as the Egyptians say, the two guineas were four, and those who played next us, seeing her success, began to pass remarks on her, making nothing of debating who she was, and discussing her shape and complexion in terms that made my cheeks burn. Whether this open admiration turned her head, or their freedom confused her, she let the money lie again; and when I would have snatched it up, not regarding her, the dealer prevented me, saying that it was too late, while she with an air, as if I had been a servant, turned and rated me sharply for a fool. This caused a little disturbance at which all the company laughed. However, the event proved me no fool, but wiser than most, for in two minutes that pretty sum, which was as much as I had ever possessed, at one time in my life, was swept off; and for three guineas the richer, which we had been a moment before, we remained one, and that my only one, the poorer!

For myself, I could have cried at the misadventure, but my mistress carried it off with a shrill laugh, and tossing her head in affected contempt—whereat, I am bound to confess, the company laughed again—

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turned from the table. I sneaked after her as miserable as you please, and in that order we had got half-way to the door, when the gentleman who had addressed her before, stepped up in front of her.

"Beauty so reckless," he said, speaking with a grin, and in a tone of greater freedom than he had used previously, "needs someone to care for it. Unless I am mistaken, mistress, you came on foot?" And with a sneering smile he dropped his eyes to the hem of her cloak.

Alas! I looked too, and the murder was out. To be sure Dorinda had clothed herself very handsomely above, but coming to her feet had trusted to her cloak to hide the deficiency she had no means to supply. Still, and in spite of this, all might have been well if she had not in her chagrin at losing forgotten the blot, and, unused to long skirts, raised them so high as to expose a foot, shapely indeed, but stockingless, and shod in an old broken shoe.

Her ears and neck turned crimson at the exposure, and she dropped her cloak as if it burned her hand. I fancied that if the stranger had looked to ingratiate himself by his ill-mannered jest, he had gone the wrong way about it, and I was not surprised when she answered in a voice quivering with mortification. "Yes, on foot. But you may spare your pains. I am in this gentleman's care, I thank you."

"Oh," he said, in a peculiar tone, "this gentleman?" And he looked me up and down.

I knew that it behoved me to ruffle it with him, and let him know by outstaring him that at a word I was ready to pull his nose. But I was a boy in strange company, and utterly cast down by the loss of my guinea; he a Court bully in sword and lace, bred to carry it in such and worse places. Though he seemed to be no more than thirty, he had a long and hard face under his periwig, and eyes both tired and melancholy; and he spoke with a drawl and a curling lip, and by the mere way he looked at me showed that he thought me no better than dirt. To

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make a long story short, I had not looked at him a moment before my eyes fell.

"Oh, this gentleman?" he said again, in a tone of cutting contempt. "Well, I hope that he has more guineas than one—or your ladyship will soon trudge it skin to mud. As it is, I fear that I detain you. Kindly carry my compliments to Farmer Grudgen—and the pigs!"

And smiling—not laughing, for a laugh seemed alien from his face—at a jest which was too near the truth not to mortify us exceedingly, my lord—for a lord I thought he was—turned away with an ironical bow; leaving us to get out of the room with what dignity we might, and such temper as remained to us. For myself I was in such a rage, both at the loss of my guinea and at being so flouted, that I could scarcely govern myself; yet in my awe of Dorinda I said nothing, expecting and fearing an outbreak on her part, the consequences of which it was not easy to foretell. I was proportionately pleased, therefore, when she made no more ado at the time, but pushing her way through the crowd in the street, turned homeward and took the road without a word.

This was so unlike her that I was at a loss to understand it, and was fain to conclude—from the fact that she two or three times paused to listen and look back—that she feared pursuit. The thought, bringing to my mind the risk of being detected and dismissed which I ran—a risk that came home to me now that the pleasure was over, and I had only in prospect my squalid bedroom and the morrow's tasks—filled me with uneasiness. But I might have spared myself, for when she spoke I found that her thoughts were on other things.

"Dick," she said, suddenly—and halted abruptly in the road, "you must lend me a guinea."

"A guinea?" I cried, aghast, and speaking, it may be, with a little displeasure. "Why, have you not just——"

"What?" she said.

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"Lost my only one."

She laughed with a recklessness that confounded me. "Well, you have got to find another one," she said. "And one to that."

"Another guinea?" I gasped.

"Yes, another guinea, and another guinea!" she answered, mimicking my tone of consternation.

"One for my shoes and stockings—oh! I wish he were dead." And she stamped her foot passionately.

"And one——"

"Yes?" I said, with a poor attempt at irony.

"And one——"

"For me to stake next Friday, when the duke passes this way on his road home."

"He does not."

"He does, he does," she retorted. "And you will do too—what I say, sir, or——"

"Or what?" I cried, calling up a spirit for once.

"Or——" and she raised her voice a little, and sang:—

But, alas, when I wake, and no Phyllis I find,
How I sigh to myself all alone!

"You never loved me!" I cried, in a rage at that and her greed.

"Have it your own way," she answered, carelessly, and sang it again; and after that there was no more talk, but we walked with all the width of the road between us; I with a sore heart and she titupping along, cool and happy, pleased, I think, that she had visited on me some of the chagrin which the stranger had caused her, and for the rest with God knows what thoughts in her heart. At least I little suspected them; yet, with the little knowledge I had, I was angry and pained; and for the time was so far freed from illusion that I would not make the overture, but hardened myself with the thought of my guinea and her selfishness; and coming to the gap in the first fence helped her over with a cold hand and no embrace such as was usual between us at such junctures.

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In a word, we were like naughty children returning after playing truant; and might have parted in that guise, and this the very best thing that could have happened to me—who had no guinea, and knew not where to get one; though I would not go so far as to say that, in the frame of mind in which I then was, it would have saved me. But in the article of parting, and when the garden fence already rose between us, yet each remained plain to the other by the light of the moon which had risen, Dorinda on a sudden raised her hands, and holding her cloak from her, stood and looked at me an instant in the most ravishing fashion, with her head thrown back and her lips parted, and her eyes shining, and the white of her neck and her bare arms and the swell of her bosom showing. I could have sworn that even the scent of her hair reached me, though that was impossible. But what I saw was enough. I might have known that she did it only to tantalise me; I might have known that she would show me what I risked; but on the instant, oblivious of all else, I owned her beauty; and, resentment and my loss alike forgotten, I sprang to the fence my blood on me, and words bubbling on my lips. Another second, and I should have been at her feet, have kissed her shoes, muddy and broken as they were; but she turned, and with a backward glance, that only the more inflamed me, fled up the garden, and to the house, whither, even at my maddest, I dared not follow her.

However, enough had passed to send me to my bed to long and lie awake; enough, the morrow come, to take all colour from the grey tasks and dull turgery of school-time; insomuch that the hours seemed days, and the days weeks, and Mr. D——'s ignorant prosing and infliction too wearisome to be borne. What my love now lacked of reverence, it made up in passion, and passion's offspring impatience; on which it is to be supposed my mistress counted, for during three whole days she kept within, and though every evening I flew to the rendezvous, and there cooled my heels for an hour, she never showed herself.

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Once, however, I heard her on the other side of the fence, singing :—

But, alas, when I wake, and no Phyllis I find,
How I sigh to myself all alone !

And, sick at heart, I understood the threat and her attitude. Nevertheless, and though the knowledge should have cured me, by convincing me that she was utterly unworthy and had never loved me, I only consumed the more for her, and grovelled the lower in spirit before her and her beauty ; and the devil presently putting in my way the means where he had already provided the motive, it was no wonder that I made but a poor resistance, and in a short time fell.

It came about in this way. In the course of the week, and before the Friday on which the duke was to return that way, Mr. D—— announced an urgent call to London ; and as he was too wise to broach such a proposal without a *quid pro quo*, Mrs. D—— must needs go with him. The stage-wagon, which travelled three days in the week, would serve next morning, and all was hasty preparation ; clothes were packed and mails got out ; a gossip, one Mrs. Harris, was engaged to take Mrs. D——'s place, and the boys were entrusted to me, with strict instructions to see all lights out at night, and no waste. That these injunctions might be the more deeply impressed on me, I was summoned to Mrs. D——'s parlour to receive them ; but unluckily with the instructions given to me were mingled house-keeping directions to Mrs. Harris, who was also present ; the result being that when I retired from the room I carried with me the knowledge that in a certain desk, perfectly accessible, my employer left three guineas, to be used in case of emergency, but otherwise not to be touched.

It was an unhappy chance, explaining, as well as accounting for, so much of what follows, that were I to enter into long details of the catastrophe it would be useless ; since the judicious reader will have

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already informed himself of a result that was never in doubt, from the time that my employer's departure at once provided the means of gratification, and by removing the restraints under which we had before laboured, held out the prospect of pleasure. Nor can I plead that I sinned in ignorance; for as I sat among the boys and mechanically heard their tasks, I called myself "Thief, thief," a hundred times, and a hundred to that; and once even groaned aloud; yet never flinched or doubted that I should take the money. Which I did—to cut a long story short—before Mr. D—— had been three hours out of the house; and that evening humbly presented the whole of it to my mistress, who rewarded my complaisance with present kisses and future pledges, to be redeemed when she should have once more tasted the pleasures of the great world.

To tell the truth, her craving for these, and to be seen again in those haunts where we had reaped nothing but loss and mortification, was a continual puzzle to me, who asked for nothing better than to enjoy her society and kindness, as far as possible from the world. But as she *would* go and *would* play, and made my subservience in this matter the condition of her favour, it was essential she should win; since I could then restore the money I had taken; whereas if she lost, I saw no prospect before me but the hideous one of detection and punishment. Accordingly, when the evening came, and we had effected the same clandestine exodus as before—but this time with less peril, Mrs. Harris being a sleepy, easy-going woman—I could think of nothing but this necessity; and far from experiencing the terrors which had beset me earlier, when Dorinda would enter the inn, gave no thought to the scene or the crowd through which we pushed, or any other of the preliminaries. On the contrary I had my soul so set upon the fortune that awaited us, that I was for passing through the door in the hardest fashion, and would scarcely stand even when a hand gripped my shoulder. However, a rough voice exclaiming in

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my ear, "Softly, youngster! Who are you that poke in so boldly? I don't know you," brought me to my senses.

"I was in last week," I answered, gasping with eagerness.

"Then you were one too many," the doorkeeper retorted, thrusting me back without mercy. "This is not a tradesman's ordinary. It is for your betters."

"But I was in," I cried, desperately. "I was in last week."

"Well, you will not go in again," he answered coolly. "For the lady it is different. Pass in, mistress," he continued, withdrawing his arm that she might pass, and looking at her with an impudent leer. "I can never refuse a pretty face. And I will bet a guinea that there is one behind that mask."

On which, to my astonishment, and while I stood agape between rage and shame, my mistress, with a hurried word—that might stand for a farewell, or might have been merely a request to me to wait, for I could not catch it—accepted the invitation, and, deserting me without the least sign of remorse, passed in and disappeared. For a moment I could scarcely, thus abandoned, believe my senses or that she had left me; then, the iron of her ingratitude entering into my soul, and a gentleman tapping me imperatively on the shoulder and saying that I blocked the way, I was fain to turn aside, and plunge into the darkness, to hide the sobs I could no longer restrain.

For a time, leaning on my forehead against a house in a side alley, I called her all the names in the world; reflecting bitterly at whose expense she was here, and at what a price I had bought her pleasure. Nor, it may be thought, was I likely to find excuses for her soon. But a lover, as he can weave his unhappiness out of the airiest trifles, so from very gossamer can he spin comfort; nor was it long before I considered the necessity under which we lay to play and win, and bethought me that, instead of finding fault with her for entering alone, I should applaud the prudence that at a pinch had borne

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this steadily in mind. After which, believing what I hoped, I soon ceased to reproach her; and jealousy giving way to suspense—since all for me now depended on the issues of gain or loss—I hastened to return to the door, and hung about it in the hope of seeing her appear.

This she did not do for some time, but the interval and my thoughts were diverted by a *rencontre* as disagreeable as it was unexpected. In my solitary condition I had made so few acquaintances in Hertford, that I fancied I stood in no fear of being recognised. I was vastly taken aback, therefore, when a gentleman, plainly dressed, happening to pause an instant on the threshold as he issued from the inn, let his glance rest on me, and, after a second look, stepped directly to me, and, with a sour aspect, asked me what I did in that place.

Then, when it was too late, I took fright, recognising him for a gentleman of a good estate in the neighbourhood, who had two sons at Mr. D——'s school and enjoyed great influence with my master, he being by far the most important of his patrons. As he belonged to the fanatical party, and in common with most of that sect had been a violent Exclusionist, I as little expected to see him in that company as he to see me. But whereas he was his own master, and besides was there—this I learned afterwards—to rescue a young relative, while I had no such excuse, he had nothing to fear and I all. I found myself, therefore, ready to sink with confusion; and even when he repeated his challenge could find no words in which to answer.

"Very well," he said, nodding grimly at that. "Perhaps Mr. D—— may be able to answer me. I shall take care to visit him to-morrow, sir, and learn whether he is aware how his usher employs his nights. Good-evening."

So saying, he left me, horribly startled, and a prey to apprehensions, which were not lessened by the guilt, that already lay on my conscience in another and more serious matter. For such is the common

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course of ill-doing; to plunge a man, I mean, deeper and deeper in the mire. I now saw not one ridge of trouble only before me, but a second and a third; and no visible way of escape from the consequences of my imprudence. To add to my fears, the gentleman on leaving me joined the same courtier who had spoken to Dorinda on the occasion of our former visit, and who had just come out; so that to my prepossessed mind nothing seemed more probable than that the latter would tell him in whose company he had seen me and the details of our adventure. As a fact, it was from this person's clutches my master's patron was here to rescue his nephew. But I did not know this, and seeking in my panic to be reassured, I asked a servant beside me who the stranger was.

"He?" he said. "Oh, he is a gentleman from the Temple. Been playing with him?" and he looked at me askance.

"No," I said.

"Oh," he replied, "the better for you."

"But what is his name?" I urged.

"Who does not know Mat. Smith, Esquire, of the Temple, is a country booby—and that is you!" the man retorted quickly, and went off laughing. Still this, seeing that I did not know the name, relieved me a little; and the next moment I was aware of Dorinda waiting for me at the door. Deducing from the smile that played on her countenance the happiest omens of success, I forgot my other troubles in the relief which this promised, and I sprang to meet her. Guiding her as quickly as I could through the crowd, I asked her the instant I could find voice to speak, what luck she had had.

"What luck?" she cried; and then pettishly, "There, clumsy! You are pulling me into that puddle! Have a care of my new shoes, will you? What luck, did you say? Why, none!"

"What? You have not lost?" I exclaimed, standing still in the road, and it seemed to me that my heart stood still also.

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"Yes, but I have!" she answered hardily.

"All?" I groaned.

"Yes, all! If you call two guineas all," she replied carelessly. "Why, you are not going to cry for two guineas, baby, are you?"

CHAPTER VI

BUT I was going to cry, and did, breaking down like a child; and that not so much at the thought of the desperate strait to which she had brought me—though this was no other than the felon's dock, with the prospect of disgrace, and to be whipped or burned in the hand, at the best, and if I had my benefit—but at the sudden conviction which came upon me, perfect and overwhelming, that my mistress, for whom I had risked so much, did not love me! In no other way, and on no other theory, could I explain the callousness so complete, thoughtlessness so cruel! Nor did her next words tend to heal the mischief, or give me comfort.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, flouncing from me in impatient contempt, and walking on the other side of the way, "if you are going to be a cry-baby, thank you for nothing! I thought you were a man!" And she began to hum an air.

"My God! I don't think you care!" I sobbed, aghast at her insensibility.

"Care?" she retorted indifferently, swinging her vizard in her hand. "For what?"

"For me! Or for anything!"

With a coolness that appalled me, she finished the verse she was humming; then, "Your finger hurts, therefore you are going to die!" she said with a sneer. "You see the fire and therefore you must be burned. Why, you have the courage of a hen! A flea! A mouse! You are not worthy the name of man!"

"I am man enough to be hanged," I answered miserably.

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"Hanged?" quoth she, quite cheerfully. "Do you think that man was ever hanged for three guineas?"

"Ay, scores," I said, "and for less."

"Then they must have been cravens like you," she retorted, perfectly well satisfied with her answer. "And spun their own ropes. Come, silly, cheer up! A great many things may happen in a week! And if that vixen is back under a week, I will eat her!"

"A week won't make three guineas," I said dolefully.

"No, but a good heart will," she rejoined. "And not three but thirty! Only," she continued, looking askance at me, "you have not the spirit of a man. You are just Tumbledown Dick, as they say, and as well named as ninepence!"

It seemed inconceivable to me that she could jest so merrily and carry herself so gaily, after such a loss; and I stopped short in sudden hope and new-born expectation, and peered at her, striving to read her thoughts. "I don't believe you have lost them!" I exclaimed at last.

"Every groat, Dick!" she answered curtly—yet still in the best of spirits. "Never doubt that."

On which it was not wonderful that my disappointment and her cheerfulness agreed so ill, that we came to bitter words, and beginning by calling one another "Thankless" and "Clutch-penny," rose presently to "Fool" and "Jade," and eventually parted on the latter at the garden fence, where Dorinda, far from lingering as on the former night, flounced from me in a passion, and left me without a single word of regret. How miserably after that I stole to bed, and how wakefully I tossed in the close garret, I cannot hope to convey to my readers; suffice it that a hundred times I cursed the folly that had led me to ruin, a hundred times went hot and cold at thought of the dock and the gallows; and yet amid all found in Dorinda's heartlessness the sharpest pain. I felt sure now, and told myself continually, that she had never loved me; therefore—at the time it seemed to

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follow—I deemed my own love at an end, and cast her off; and heaping the sharpest reproaches on her head, found my one sweet consolation—whereat I wept miserably—in composing a last dying speech and confession that should soften at length that obdurate bosom, and break that unfeeling heart.

But with the day, and the rising to imminent terrors and hourly fear of detection, came first regret, then self-reproach—lest I too should be somewhat in fault—then a revival of passion; lastly, a frantic yearning to be reconciled to the only person to whom I could speak freely, or who knew the danger and strait in which I stood. My heart melting like water at the thought, I was ready to do anything or say anything, to abase myself to any depth, in order to regain her favour and have her advice; and the absence of Mr. and Mrs. D——, and Mrs. Harris's easiness rendering it a matter of no difficulty to seek her, in the course of the afternoon I took my courage in my hands and went into the next house. There I found only Mrs. Harris.

"The little slut has stepped out," she said, looking up from the pot over which she was stooping. "She asked leave for half an hour, and has been gone an hour. But it is the way of the wenches all the world over. Do you beware of them, Mr. Price," she continued, eyeing me, and laughing jollily.

I made some trifling answer, and, returning to my own domain with all the pangs of loneliness added to those of terror, sat down in the dingy, dreary taskroom and abandoned myself to bitter forebodings. She did not, she never could have loved me! I knew it and felt it now. Yet I must think of her or go mad. I must think of her or of the cart and cord; and so, through the hours that followed, I had only eyes for the next garden, and ears for her voice. The boys and their chattering, and the necessity I was under of playing my part before them, well-nigh mastered me. For, at any hour, on any day, while I sat there among them, Mr. and Mrs. D—— might return, and the loss be discovered; and yet, and

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though time was everything, all the efforts I made to see Jennie or get speech with her failed; and of myself I seemed to be unable to think out any plan or way of escape.

I am sure that the most ascetic, could he have weighed the tortures of those four days during which I sat surrounded by the boys, and now making frantic efforts to appear myself, now sunk in a staring lethargy of despair, would have deemed them a punishment more than commensurate with my guilt. The unusual air of peace and quietness with which Mrs. D——'s absence invested the school had no more power to soothe me than the presence of Mrs. Harris, nodding over her plain-stitch in the next garden had power to banish the burning gusts of fear that at times parched my skin. At length, on the fifth day, the immediate warning of coming judgment arrived in the shape of a letter announcing that my employer would return (D.V.) by the night wagon, which in the ordinary course was due to reach Ware about six next morning.

At that I could stand the strain no longer, but flinging appearance and deception to the winds, I rose from the class I was pretending to teach, and in a disorder I made no effort to suppress, I followed Mrs. Harris, who, having declared the news, was already waddling back to the next house. She started at sight of me in her train—as she well might, for it was the busiest time of the day—then asked if anything ailed me.

"No," I said. "I want a word with Jennie."

"Do you?" quoth she, looking hard at me. "So, it would seem, do a good many young fellows. She is a nice handful if ever there was one."

"Why?" I stammered.

"Why?" she answered in a tone very sharp for her. "Why, because—but what have you to do with Jennie, young man?"

"Nothing," I said.

"Then have nothing," she answered promptly, and shook her sides at her sharpness. "That is no

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puzzle ! And as it is no more than half-past ten, and I hear your boys rampaging like so many wild Irishmen—suppose you go back to them, young man ! ”

I obeyed ; but whatever effect her warning might have had earlier—and I shrewdly suspect that it would have affected me as much as water affects a duck’s back—it came too late ; my one desire now being to see the girl, even as my one hope lay in her advice. Nine had struck that evening, however, and I had grown fairly sick with fear, before my efforts were rewarded, and stealing into the garden on a last desperate search—I think for the twentieth time—I came on her standing in the dusk, beside the fence where I had so often met her.

I sprang to her side, relief at my heart, reproaches on my lips, but it was only to recoil at sight of her face, grown hard and old and pinched, and for the moment almost ugly. “ Why, child ! ” I cried, forgetting my own trouble. “ What is it ? ”

She laughed without mirth, looking at me strangely. “ What do you suppose ? ” she said huskily, and I could see that fear was on her. “ Do you think that you are the only one in danger ? ”

“ How ? ” I exclaimed.

“ How ? ” she replied in a tone of mockery. “ Why, do you suppose that stockings and shoes are the only things that cost money ? Or that vizor masks and gloves and hoods grow on bushes ? Briefly, fool, if you can give me four guineas I am saved. If not——”

“ My God ! ” I cried, horror-stricken.

“ If not,” she continued hardily, “ you have taught me to read, and that may save my neck. I suppose I shall be sent to the plantations, to be beaten weekly, and work in the sun, and——”

“ Four guineas ! ” I groaned.

“ Yes, seven in all ! ” she answered with a sneer. “ Have you got them ? ”

“ No, nor a groat,” I answered, overwhelmed by the discovery that instead of giving help she needed it. “ Not a penny ! ”

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"Then it must be got!" she answered fiercely. "It must be got!" and as she repeated the words she dropped her mocking tone and spoke with feverish energy. "It must be got, Dick!" and she seized my hands and held them. "It must be, and can be, if you have a spark of spirit, if you are not the poor mean thing I sometimes think you. Listen! Listen! In the old man's room upstairs—the door is locked and double-locked, I have tried it—are sixty guineas, in a bag! Sixty guineas, in a drawer of the old bureau by the bed!"

"It is death," I cried feebly, recoiling from her as I spoke. "It is death! I dare not! I dare not do it!"

"Then we hang! We hang, man!" she answered fiercely. "You and I! Will it be better to hang for a lamb than a sheep? For seven guineas than for sixty?"

"But if we take it, what shall we be the better?" I said weakly. "He returns in the morning."

"By the morning, given the money, we shall be a score of miles away," she answered, flinging her arms round my neck, and hanging on my breast, while her hot breath fanned my cheek. No wonder I felt my brain reel, and my will melt. "Away from here, Dick," she repeated softly. "Away—and together!"

Yet I made an effort to withstand her. "You forget the door," I said. "If the door is locked, and Mrs. Harris sleeps in the next room, how can it be done?"

"Not by the door, but by the window," she replied. "There is a ladder in the second garden from this, and the latch of the window is weak. The old fool indoors sleeps like a hog. By eleven she will be sound. And, oh, Dick!" my mistress cried, breaking down on a sudden and snatching my hands to her bosom, "will you see me shamed? Play the man for ten minutes only—for ten minutes only, and by morning we shall be safe, and far from here! And—and together, Dick! Together!"

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Was it likely, I ask, was it possible, that I should long resist pleading such as this? That holding her in my arms, in the warm summer night, with her hair on my breast, while the moon sailed overhead and a cricket chirped in the wall hard by—was it likely or possible that I should steel my heart against her? that I should turn from the cup of pleasure, who had tasted as yet so few delights, and drudged and been stinted all my life? Whose appetite had known no daintier relish than the dull round of dumpling and bacon, or at the best salt meat and spinach; and who for sole companionship had been shut in, June days and December nights alike, with a band of mischievous boys, whom the ancients justly called *genus improbum*. At any rate, I did not; to my shame, great or small, according as I shall be harshly or charitably judged—I did not; but with a beating heart and choked voice I gave my word and left her; and an hour later I crept down the creaking stairs for the last time, guilty and shivering, a bundle in my hand, and found her waiting for me in the old place.

I confess that the flurry of my spirits in this crisis was such as to disturb my judgment; and my passion for my mistress being no longer of the higher kind, these two things may account for the fact that I felt no wonder or repulsion when she explained to me, coolly and in detail, where the bureau stood, and in what part of it lay the money; even adding that I had better bring away a pair of silver candlesticks which I should find in another place. By the time she had made these things clear to me the favourable moment was come; the lights of the town had long been extinguished, and the house obscuring the moon cast a black shadow on the garden that greatly seconded our movements. Yet for myself, and though all went well with us, I trembled at the faintest sound, and started if a leaf stirred; nay, to this day I willingly believe that the smallest trifle, a light at a window or a distant voice, would have deterred me from the adventure. But nothing

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occurred to hinder or alarm, and the darkness cloaking us only too effectually, and my accomplice directing me where to find the ladder, I fetched it, and with her help thrust it over the fence and climbed over after it.

This was a small thing, the worst being to come. The part of the garden under the wall of the house was paved; it was only with the greatest exertion therefore and the utmost care that we could raise the ladder on it without noise; and but for the surprising strength which Jennie showed, I doubt if we should have succeeded, my hands trembled so violently. In the end we raised it, however; the upper part fell lightly beside the second floor casement, and Jennie whispered to me to ascend.

I had now gone too far to retreat, and I obeyed, and had mounted two steps, when I heard distinctly—the sound coming sharp and clear through the night—the shod hoof of a horse paw the ground, apparently in the road beyond the house. Scared by such a sound at such a time, I slid rapidly down into Jennie's arms. "Hush!" I cried. "Did you hear that? There is some one there!"

But angered by my sudden descent, which had come near to knocking her down, she whispered in a rage that I was either the biggest fool or the poorest craven in the world. "Go up! Go up!" she continued fiercely, almost striking me in her excitement. "There are sixty guineas awaiting us up there—sixty guineas, man, and you budge because a horse stirs."

"But what is it doing there?" I remonstrated. "A horse, Jennie, at this time of night!"

"God knows!" she answered. "What is that to us?"

Still I lingered a moment, unwilling to ascend; but hearing nothing, and thinking I might have been mistaken, I was ashamed to hang back longer, and I went up, though my legs trembled under me, and a bird darting suddenly out of the ivy glued me to the ladder by both hands, with the sweat standing out on my face. Alone, nothing on earth would

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have persuaded me to it; but with Jennie below I dared not flinch, and the latch of the window proving as weak as she had described it, in a moment the lattice swung open and I climbed over the sill.

Feeling the floor with my feet, I stood an instant in the dark stuffy room, and listened. It smelled strongly of herbs, on which account I hate that smell to this day. I could hear Mrs. Harris snoring next door; and the pendulum of the fine new clock on the stairs, which was Mrs. D——'s latest pride, was swinging to and fro regularly; I knew that at the slightest alarm the house would awake. But I had gone too far to recede; and, though I feared and sweated, and at the touch of a hand must have screamed aloud, I went forward and, groping my way across the floor, found the bureau, and tried the drawer.

It was locked, but crazily; and Jennie, foreseeing the obstacle, had given me a chisel. Inserting the point, I listened awhile to assure myself that all was quiet, and then with the resolution of despair I forced the drawer open with a single wrench. Probably the noise was no great one, but to my ears it rang through the night loud as the crack of laden ice. I heard the sleeper in the next room cease her snoring and turn in the bed; and cowering down on the floor I gave up all for lost. But in a moment she began to breathe again, and encouraged by that and the silence in the house, I drew the drawer open, and feeling for the bag, discovered it, and clutching it firmly, turned to the window.

I found that Jennie had mounted the ladder, and was looking into the room, her hands on the sill, her head dark against the sky. "Have you got it?" she whispered, thrusting in her arm and groping for me. "Then give it me while you get the candlesticks. They are wrapped in woollen, and are under the bed."

I gave her the bag, which chinked as it passed from hand to hand; then I turned obediently, and groping my way to the bed which stood beside the

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bureau, I felt under it. I found nothing, but did not at once give up. The candlesticks might lie on the farther side, and accordingly I rose and climbed over the bed and tried again, passing my hands through the flue and dust which had gathered under Mrs. D——'s best feather bed.

How long I might have searched in the dark, and vainly, I cannot say, for my efforts were brought to a premature end by a dull thud that came to my ears, apparently from the next room. Certain that it could be caused by nothing less than Mrs. Harris getting out of bed, I crawled out, and got to my feet in a panic, and stood in the dark quaking and listening, so terrified that I am sure if the good woman had entered at that moment I should have fallen on my knees before her, and confessed all. Nothing followed, however; the house remained quiet; I heard no second sound. But my nerve was gone. I wanted nothing so much now as to be out of the place; not for a thousand guineas would I have stayed; and without giving another thought to the candlesticks, I groped my way to the window, and, passing one leg over the sill, felt hurriedly for the ladder.

I failed to find it, and tried again; then peering down, called Jennie by name. She did not answer. A second time I called, and felt about with my foot; still without success. Then as it dawned upon me—at last—that the ladder was really gone, and I a prisoner, I thought of prudence no longer, but I called frantically, at first in a whisper, and then as loudly as I dared; called and called again, "Jennie! Jennie!" And yet again, "Jennie!"

Still no answer came; but, listening intently, in one of the intervals of silence, I caught the even beat of hoofs, receding along the road, and growing each moment less marked. They held me; scarcely breathing, I listened to them, until they died away in the distance of the summer night, and only the sharp insistent chirp of the cricket, singing in the garden below, came to my ears.

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CHAPTER VII

How long I hung at the window, at one time stunned and stricken down by the catastrophe that had befallen me, and at another feeling frantically for the ladder which I had over and over again made sure was not there, I know no more than another; but that only after a time, first suspicion and then rage darted lightning-like through the stupor that clouded my mind, and I awoke to all the tortures that love outraged by treachery can feel; with such pangs and terrors added as only a faithful beast, bound and doomed and writhing under the knife of its master, may be supposed to endure.

For a while, it is true, imagining that Jennie, terrified by someone's approach, had lowered the ladder and withdrawn herself, and so would presently return to free me, I hoped against hope. But as minutes passed, and yet more minutes, laden only with the cricket's even chirp, and the creepy rustling of the wind in the poplars, and still failed to bring her, the sound of retreating hoofs which I had heard recurred to my mind, with dreadful significance, and on the top of it a hundred suspicious circumstances, among which her sudden passion when I had taken fright at the foot of the ladder was not the least, so her avoidance of me during the last few days and her frequent absences from the house, spoken to by Mrs. Harris, had their weight. In fine, by the light of her desertion after receiving the plunder, and while I sought the candlesticks—which I had now convinced myself were not there—many things obscure before, or to which I had wilfully shut my eyes—as her callousness, her greed, her recklessness—stood out plainly; while these again, being coolly considered, reflected so seriously on her, as to give her sudden departure the worst possible appearance, even in a lover's eyes. The days had been when I would not have believed such a thing of her at the mouth of an angel from Heaven. But

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much had happened since, to which my passion had blinded me, temporarily only; so that it needed but a flash of searing light to make all clear, and convince me that she had not only left me, but left me trapped—I who had given up all and risked all for her!

In the first agony of pain and rage wrought by a conviction so horrible, I could think only of her treachery and my loss; and head to knees on the bare floor of the room, I wept as if my heart would break, or choked with the sobs that seemed to rend my breast. And little wonder, seeing that I had given her a boy's first devotion, and that of all sins ingratitude has the sharpest tooth! But to this paroxysm, when I had nearly exhausted myself, came an end and an antidote in the shape of urgent fear; which suddenly flooding my soul, roused me from my apathy of grief, and set me to pacing the room in a dreadful panic, trying now the door and now the window. But on both my attacks were in vain, the former being locked and resisting the chisel, while the latter hung thirty feet above the paved yard.

Thus caught and snared as neatly as any bird in a springe, I had no resource but in my wits; and for a time, as I had nothing of which I could form a rope, I busied myself with the expedient of throwing out the feather-bed and leaping upon it. But when I had dragged it to the window, and came to measure the depth, I recoiled, as the most desperate might, from the leap; and softly returning the bed to its place, I fell to biting my nails, or fitfully roamed from place to place, according as despair or some new hope possessed me.

In one or other of these moods the dawn found me; and then in a surprisingly short time I heard the dreaded sounds of life awaken round me, and creeping to the window I closed it, and crouched down on the floor. Presently Mrs. Harris began to stir, and a boy walked whistling shrilly across the adjacent yard; and then—strangest of all things, and not to be invented—in the crisis of my fate, with the feet of those who must detect me almost on the stairs,

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I fell asleep, and awoke only when a key grated in the lock of the room, and I started up to find Mr. D—— in the doorway staring at me, and behind him a crowd of piled-up faces.

"Why, Price!" he cried, with a look of stupefaction, as he came slowly into the room, "what is the meaning of this?"

Then I suppose my shame and guilty silence told him, for with a sudden scowl and an oath he strode to the bureau and dragged out the drawer. A glance showed him that the money was gone, and shouting frantically to those at the door to keep it—to keep it, though they were half a dozen to one!—he clutched me by the breast of my coat, and shook me until my teeth chattered.

"Give it up," he cried, spluttering with rage. "Give it up, you beggar's brat! Or, by heaven, you shall hang for it!"

But as I had nothing to give up, and could not speak, I burst into tears; which, with the odd part I had played in staying in the room to be taken, and perhaps my youth and innocent air, aroused the neighbours' surprise, who, crowding round, asked him solicitously what was missing. He answered, after a moment's hesitation, sixty guineas. One had already clapped his hands over my clothes, and another had forced my mouth open; but on this they desisted, and stood, full of admiration.

"He cannot have swallowed that," said the most active, gaping at me.

"No, that is certain. But what beats me," said another, looking round, "is how he got here."

"To say nothing of why he stayed here!" replied the former.

"I'll tell you what," quoth a third, shaking his head. "There is some hocus-pocus in this. And I should not wonder, neighbours, if the Romans were at the bottom of it!"

The theory appeared to commend itself to more than one—for they were all of the fanatical party; but it was swept to the winds by the entrance of

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Mrs. D——, who, having heard of robbery, came in like a whirlwind, her face on fire, and made no more ado, but rushed upon me, and tore and slapped my cheeks with all her might, crying with each blow, "You nasty thief, will that teach you better manners? That for your roguery! and that! Oh, you jail-bird, I'll teach you!"

How long she would have continued to chastise me I cannot say, but her husband presently stepped in to protect me, and, being thoroughly winded, she let me go pretty willingly. But when she had learned, having hitherto been under the impression that I had been seized in the act with the money upon me, that the latter could not be found, her face turned yellow, and she sat down in a chair.

"Have you searched?" she gasped.

"Everywhere," the neighbours answered her.

"He must have thrown it through the window."

They shook their heads.

On that she jumped up and looked at me with a cold spite in her face that made me shiver. "Then I will tell you what it is," she said, "he has given it to that hussy, and she has taken it! But I will have it out of him; where the money is, and she is, and how he got in! Mr. D——, when you have done standing there like a gaby, fetch your stoutest cane; and do you, my friends, lay him across that bed! And if we do not cut it out of his skin his name is not Richard Price. I wish I had the wench here, and I would serve her the same!"

I screamed, and fell on my knees as they laid hands on me, but Mrs. D—— was a woman without bowels, and the men were complaisant and not unwilling to see the cruel sport of the usher flogged, and the schoolmaster disciplined; and it would have gone hard with me, in spite of my prayers, if the constable had not arrived at that moment, and requested with dignity to see his prisoner. Introduced to me, he stared, and, moved I believe by an impulse of pity, said I was young to hang.

"Ay, but not too good!" Mrs. D—— answered

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shrilly, her head trembling with passion. "He and the hussy that is gone have robbed me of eighty guineas in a green bag, as I am prepared to swear!"

"Sixty, Mrs. D——," said her husband, looking a warning at her and then askance at his neighbours.

"Rot take the man, does it matter to a guinea or two?" she retorted—but her sallow face flushed a little. "At any rate," she continued, pressing her thin lips together and nodding her head viciously, "sixty or eighty, they have taken them."

It seemed, however, that even to that one of the neighbours had a word to say. "As to the girl, I am not so sure, Mrs. D——," he struck in ponderously. "If she is the wench that has been carrying on with the gentleman at the 'Rose,' she has had other fish to fry. Though I don't say, mind you, that she has *not* been in this. Only——"

But Mrs. D—— could restrain herself no longer. "Only! only! Gentleman at the 'Rose'!" she cried. "Why, man, are you mad? What do you think has my maid—though maid she is not, but a dirty drab, and more is the pity I took her out of charity from the parish—she was Kitty Higgs's base-born brat, as you know—what has she to do with gentlemen at the 'Rose'?"

"Well, that is not for me to say," the man answered quietly. "Only I know that for a week or more a wench has been walking with a gentleman in the roads and so forth, by night as well as by day. I came on them twice myself hard by here; and though she was dressed more like a fine madam than a serving girl, I watched her into your house. And for the rest, Mrs. Harris must know more than I do."

But Mrs. Harris, when Mrs. D—— turned on her in a white rage, could only cover her head and weep in a corner; as much, I believe, out of sorrow for me as on her own account. However, the fact that the good-natured woman had left Jennie pretty much to her own devices could not be gainsaid; and Mrs. D—— had much to say on it. But when she talked of sending after the baggage and jailing her, ay, and

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the gentleman at the "Rose" too, if he could not pay the money, the constable pursed up his lips.

"It is to be remembered that he came with His Royal Highness, our gracious Prince," he said, swelling out his chest and puffing out his cheeks with importance. "And though it is true he ordered his horses and went for London last evening—as I know myself, having seen him go, and seen him before for the matter of that at Hertford Assizes, for he is a Counsellor—it does not follow that the wench went with him. Or, if she did, Mrs. D——, ——"

"That she had anything to do with this money," the neighbour who had spoken before put in.

"Precisely, Mr. Jenkins," the constable answered. "You are a man of sense. For my part," he continued, looking round a little defiantly, "I am no Whig, and I am not for meddling with Court gentlemen, and least of all lawyers. And if you will take my advice, Mr. D——, you will be satisfied to lay this young jail-bird by the heels; and if he does not speak before the rope is round his neck, it is not likely that you will get your money other ways. But, lord," the good man went on, standing back from me, to view me the better, "he is young to be such a villain! It is 'broke and entered, too,' and so he will swing for it." And he took off his hat and wiped his bald head, while he gazed at me between pity and admiration.

Mrs. D——, who was very far from sharing either of these feelings, would have had me taken at once before a justice and committed. But the constable, partly to prove his importance, and partly, I believe, to give me a chance of disclosing where the money lay before it was too late, would have the house and garden searched, and all the boys examined; under the impression that I might have had one of these for my accomplice. Naturally, nothing came of this, except the discovery that I had been out of nights lately; which had scarcely been made when who should appear on the scene, in an unlucky hour for me, but the gentleman who had identified me

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outside the gaming-room at the "Rose." As he had come for the very purpose of laying a complaint against me, his story destroyed the last scrap of my credit, by exhibiting me as a secret rake; and this removing all doubt of my guilt, if any were still entertained even by Mrs. Harris, it was determined to convey me, dinner over, to Sir Baldwin Winston's, at Abbot's Stanstead, to be committed; the two justices who resided in Ware being at the moment disabled.

All this time, and while my fate was being decided, I listened to one and another in a dull despair, which deprived me of the power to defend myself; and from which nothing less than Mrs. D——'s atrocious proposal to flog me, until I gave up the money, could draw me, and that only for a moment. Conscious of my guilt, and seized in the act and on the scene of my crime, I beheld only the near and certain prospect of punishment; while I had not the temptation to tell all, and inform against my crafty accomplice, to which a knowledge of her destination must have exposed me. Besides—and I think a great part of my apathy was due to this—I still felt the stunning effects of the blow which her cruel treachery had dealt me. I saw her in her true light; and as I sat, weeping silently, and seeming to those who watched me, little moved, I was thinking at least as much of the past and my love, and her craft, as of the fate that lay before me.

Though this was presently brought vividly before me, and of all persons by Mrs. Harris. Mrs. D—— of herself would have given me neither bit nor sup in the house; but the constable insisting that the King's prisoner must be fed, Mrs. Harris, tearful and shaking, was allowed to bring me some broken victuals. These set before me, the good soul, instead of retiring, pottered aimlessly about the room; and by and bye got behind me; on which, or rather a moment later, I felt something sharp and cold at the nape of my neck and started up. Bursting into a flood of tears she plumped down on a seat, and I

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saw that she had a pair of scissors and a scrap of my hair in her hand.

"Good Lord!" I said.

Doubtless the tone in which I spoke betrayed me, for the constable's man who was in charge of me laughed brutally. "Gad, if he does not think she did it out of love!" he cried, speaking to a friend who was sitting with him. "When all the old dame wants is a charm for the rheumatics; and she thinks the chance too good to be lost."

Then I remembered that the hair of a hanged man is in that part held to be sovereign for the rheumatics; and I sat down feeling faint and cold.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT saying, though a small thing, and a foolish one, brought my state home to me; and, moreover, filled me with so grisly a foreboding of the gibbet that henceforth I gave my treacherous mistress no more thought than she deserved—which was little; but I became wholly taken up with my own fate, and especially with the recollection of a man whom I had once seen, pitched and hanging in chains, at Much Hadham cross-roads. The horrible spectacle he had become, ten days dead, grew on my mind, until I grovelled and sweated in a green terror, and that not so much at the prospect of death—though this sent me hot and cold in the same instant—as of the harsh rope about my neck, and the sacking bands, and the dreadful apparatus, and the grinning loathsome thing I must become.

Near swooning at these thoughts, I sank huddled into the chair; and was presently plucked up by the constable's assistant, who, seeing my state, came forward, and though he was naturally a coarse fellow, strove to hearten me, saying that there was always hope until the cart moved, and that many a man cast for death was drinking the King's health in the plantations.

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On that a last flicker of pride came to my aid, and trying to meet his eye I muttered that it was not that; that I was not afraid, and that at worst I should be burned in the hand.

"To be sure!" he said, nodding and looking at me curiously. "To be sure. It is well to be a scholar!"

I was athirst, however, to get some further and better assurance from him; and fixing my eyes on his face, I asked hoarsely, "You think that is certain? You think there is no doubt?"

"Certain sure, my Toby!" he answered. But I saw that, as he moved away, he winked to his comrade, and I heard the latter ask him softly, as he took his seat again, "Is't so? Will the lad cheat the hangman?"

"Not he!" was the reply, uttered in a whisper—but terror sharpened my ears. "There was so long a list at the last assizes, and half of them *legit*, that it was given out that they would override it this time, and make examples. And ten to one he will swing, Ben."

"But is it the law?"

I did not hear the answer for the drumming in my ears and the dreadful confusion in my brain; which were such that I was not aware of the constable's entrance or of anything that happened after that, until I found myself in the road climbing clumsily on the back of a pony, in the middle of a throng of staring, curious faces. My feet being secured under the beast's belly—at which some gave a hand, while others stood off, whispering and looking strangely at me—the constable mounted himself, and shouting to his wife that he should take me on to Hertford Gaol, and should not be back until late, led me out of the crowd, Mr. D—— and Mr. Jenkins bringing up the rear. The last I saw of the school the boys were hanging out of the windows to see me go; and Mrs. D—— was standing in the doorway, and unappeased by my misery, was shrilly denouncing me—hands and tongue all going—to a group of her gossips.

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Our road took us past the "Rose Inn" and through a great part of the town, but no impression of either remains with me, my only recollection being of the sunshine that lay over the country, and of the happiness that all creatures, all living things, save my doomed self, enjoyed. The bitterness of the thought that yesterday I had been as these, free to move and live and breathe, caused great tears to roll down my cheeks; but my companions, whose thoughts had already gone forward to the Steward's Room at Sir Winston's, and the entertainment they expected there, took little notice of me, and less after the porter at the lodge told them that there were grand doings at the house, and a great company, including a lord, come unexpectedly from London.

"I don't think ye'll be welcome," the porter added, looking curiously at me.

"Justice's business," the constable replied sturdily. "The King must be served."

"Ay, that is what you all say when you've something to gain by it," the porter retorted; and went in.

All which I heard idly, not supposing that it meant to me the difference between life and death, fortune and misery; or that in the company come unexpectedly from London lurked my salvation. If I dwelt on the news at all it was only as it might affect me by adding to the shame I felt. But in this I deceived myself, for when the ordeal of waiting in the servants' hall—where the maids pitied me, and would have fed me if I could have eaten—was over, and we were ushered into the parlour in which Sir Winston, who had newly risen from dinner, would see us, we found only one gentleman with him.

The two stood at the farther end of a long narrow room, in the bay of a large window, that, open to the ground, permitted a view of cool sward and yew hedges. That they had had companions, lately withdrawn, was clear; and this, not only from the length of the table, which, bestrewn with plates and glasses and half-empty flagons, stretched up the room from us to them, but from two chairs, thrown down

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in the hurry of rising, and six or seven others thrust back, haphazard, against the panels. In the side of the room were four tall straight windows that allowed the sunshine to fall in regular bars on the table; and these, displaying here a little pool of spilled claret, and there a broken tobacco-pipe, the ash still smouldering, gave a touch of grimness to the luxurious disorder.

The same incongruity was to be observed in the appearance of the elder and stouter of the two men, who had hung his periwig on the back of a chair, and showed a bald head and flushed face that agreed very ill with his laced cravat and embroidered coat. Standing with his feet apart and his arm outstretched, he was not immediately aware of our entrance, but continued to address his companion in words that were coherent, yet betrayed how he had been employed.

"Crop-eared knaves, my lord, half of them, and I one!" he cried, as we came to a halt a little within the door, to await his pleasure—I with shaking knees and sinking heart. "And ready to become the same again if the times call for it. For why? Because it was only so we could keep or get, my lord. And martyrs have been few in my time, though fools plenty."

"I should be sorry to deny the last, Sir Winston," his companion answered, smiling; for whom at the moment, blind bat as I was, I had no eyes, seeing in him only a noble youth, handsomely dressed and periwigged, and two, or it might be three, years older than myself; whereas I hung on the Justice's nod. "But here is your case," the young man continued, turning to me, and speaking in a pleasant voice.

"And a hard case one of them is," the Justice answered jollily, as he turned to us, and singled out the constable. "That is you, Dyson!" he continued, "one of those of whom I have been telling you, my lord. A psalm-singer in the troubles, sergeant in Lord Grey's regiment, a Roundhead, and ran away,

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with better men than himself, at Cropredy Bridge. To-day he damns a Whig, and goes to bed drunk every twenty-ninth of May."

"Having a good example, your honour," the constable answered, grinning.

"Ay, to be sure. And why don't you follow it also?" Sir Winston continued, turning to the school-master. "But crop-eared you were and crop-eared you are; one of Shaftesbury's brisk boys, my lord! And ought to be fined for a ranter every Monday morning, if all had their deserts."

"Then I am afraid that your theory does not apply to him, Sir Winston," the young man said with a smile. "Here is one martyr already; and if one martyr, why not many?"

"Martyr?" the Justice answered, with half a dozen oaths. "He? No one less! He goes to church as you and I do, and does not smart to the tune of a penny! It is true he pulls a solemn face and abhors mince-pies and plum-porridge. But why? Because he keeps a school, and the righteous, or what are left of them, who are just such hypocrites as himself, resort unto his company with boys and guineas! Resort unto his company, eh, D——?" the Justice repeated gleefully, addressing the school-master. "That is the phrase, isn't it? Oh, I have chopped Scripture with old Noll in my time. And so it pays, do you see, my lord? When it does not, he'll damn the Whigs and turn Tantivy or Abhorrer, or something that does. And so it is with all; they are loyal. Never were Englishmen more loyal; but to what are they loyal? Themselves, my lord!"

"Yet there are Whigs who do not keep schools," the young lord said, after a hearty laugh.

"Ay, my lord, and why?" Sir Winston answered, in high good humour, "because we are all trimmers to the wind, but some trim too late, and some too soon. And those are your Whigs. Never you turn Whig, my lord, whatever you do, or you will die in a Dutch garret like Tony Shiftsbury! And if any-one could have made Whiggery pay nowadays, clever

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Anthony would have. Here's his health, but I doubt he is in hell these eight months."

And Sir Winston, going to the table, filled and drank off a bumper of claret. Then he filled again. "The King—God bless him—is not very well, I hear," said he, winking at the young lord. "So I will give you another toast. His Highness's health, and confusion to all who would exclude him! And now what is this business, Dyson? Who is the lad? What has he been doing?"

The constable began to explain, but before he had uttered many words, the baronet, whose last draught had more than a little fuddled him, cut him short. "Oh, come to me to-morrow," he said. "Or stay! You are in the Commission for the county, my lord?"

"I am, but I have not acted," the young man answered.

"Rot it, man, but you shall act now! Burglary, is it? Broke and entered, eh? Then that is a hanging matter, and a young hound should be blooded. I am off! My lord will do it, Dyson. My lord will do it."

With which the Justice lurched out of the window so quickly, not to say unsteadily, that he was gone before his companion could remonstrate. The young lord, thus abandoned, looked at first at a nonplus, and seemed for a while more than half inclined to follow. But changing his mind, and curious, I am willing to believe, to hear the case of a prisoner so much out of the common as I must have appeared to him, he turned to us, and adopting a certain stateliness, which came easily to him, young as he was, he told the constable he would hear him.

Then it was that, hanging for my life on the nods and words of intelligence that from time to time fell from him, as he lifted the constable out of the slough of verbiage in which he floundered, I dared again to hope; and noting with eyes sharpened by terror the cast of his serious, handsome features, and the curves of his mouth, sensitive as a woman's yet wondrously under control, saw a prospect of life.

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For a time indeed I had nothing more substantial on which to build than such signs, so damning seemed the tale that branded me as taken in the act and on the scene of my crimes. But when the young peer, after eyeing me gravely and pitifully, asked if they had found the money on me, and the constable answered, "No," and my lord retorted, "Then where was it?" and got no answer; and again when he inquired as to the lock on the door and the height of the window, and who had aided me to enter, and learned that a girl was suspected and no one else—then I felt the blood beat hotly in my head, and a mist come before my eyes.

"Who is his accomplice? Pooh! there must be one!" he said.

"The girl, may it please your lordship," the constable answered.

"The girl? Then why should she leave him to be taken? How did he enter?"

"By a ladder, it is supposed, my lord."

"It is supposed?"

"Yes, my lord."

"But ladder or no ladder, why did she leave him?"

The constable scratched his head.

"Perhaps they were surprised, please your lordship," he ventured at last.

"But the boy was found in the room at seven, dolt. And the sun is up before four. What was he doing all those hours? Surprised, pooh!"

"Well, I don't know as to that, your worship," the man answered sturdily; "but only that the prisoner was found in the room, in which he had not ought to be, and the money was gone from the room where it had ought to be!"

"And the bureau was broken open," Mr. D—cried eagerly. "And what is more, he has never denied it, my lord! Never!"

At that and at sight of the change that came over my judge's face the hope that had risen in me died suddenly; and I saw again the grim prospect of the

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prison and the gibbet; and to be led from one to the other, dumb, one of a drove, unregarded. And, it coming upon me strongly that in a moment it would be too late, I found my voice and cried to him, "Oh, my lord, save me!" I cried. "Help me! For the sake of God, help me!"

Whether my words moved him or he had not yet given up my case, he looked at me attentively, and with a shade as of recollection on his face. Then he asked quietly what I was.

"Usher in a school, my lord," someone answered.

"Poor devil!" he exclaimed. And then, to the others, "Here, you! Withdraw a little to the passage, if you please. I would speak with him alone."

The constable opened his mouth in demur, but the young gentleman would not suffer it, saying with a fine air that there was no resisting: "Pooh, man, I am Lord Shrewsbury! I will be responsible for him." And with that he got them out of the room.

CHAPTER IX

I KNOW now that there never was a man in whom the natural propensity to side with the weaker party was by custom and exercise more highly developed than in my late lord, in whose presence I then stood; who, indeed, carried that virtue to such an extent that if any fault could be found with his public carriage—which I am very far from admitting, but only that such a colour might be given to some parts of it by his enemies—the flaw was attributable to this excess of generosity. Yet he has since told me that on this occasion of our first meeting it was neither my youth nor my misery—in the main, at any rate—that induced him to take so extraordinary a step as that of seeing me alone; but a strange and puzzling reminiscence, which my features aroused in him, and whereto his first words, when we were left together, bore witness. "Where, my lad," said he, staring at me, "have I seen you before?"

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As well as I could, for the dread of him in which I stood, I essayed to clear my brain and think; and in me also, as I looked at him, the attempt awoke a recollection, as if I had somewhere met him. But I could conceive one place only where it was possible I might have seen a man of his rank; and so stammered that perhaps at the "Rose Inn," at Ware, in the gaming-room I might have met him.

His lip curled, "No," he said coldly, "I have honoured the Groom-Porter at Whitehall once and again by leaving my guineas with him. But at the 'Rose Inn,' at Ware—never! And heavens, man," he continued in a tone of contemptuous wonder, "what brought such as you in that place?"

In shame, and aware, now that it was too late, that I had said the worst thing in the world to commend myself to him, I stammered that I had gone thither—that I had gone thither with a friend.

"A woman?" he said quickly.

I allowed that it was so.

"The same that led you into this?" he continued sharply.

But to that I made no answer: whereon with kindly sternness he bade me remember where I stood, and that in a few minutes it would be too late to speak.

"You can trust me, I suppose," he continued with a fine scorn, "that I shall not give evidence against you? By being candid, therefore, you may make things better, but can hardly make them worse."

Whereon I have every reason to be thankful, nay, it has been a matter for a life's rejoicing that I was not proof against his kindness; but without more ado, sobbing over some parts of my tale, and whispering others, I told him my whole story from the first meeting with my temptress—so I may truly call her—to the final moment when, the money gone, and the ladder removed, I was rudely awakened, to find myself a prisoner. I told it, I have reason to believe, with feeling, and in words that carried conviction; the more as, though skilled in literary composition,

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and in writing *secundum artem*, I have little imagination. At any rate, when I had done, and quavered off reluctantly into a half coherent and wholly piteous appeal for mercy, I found my young judge gazing at me with a heat of indignation in cheek and eye, that strangely altered him.

"Good G——!" he cried, "what a Jezebel!" And in words which I will not here repeat, he said what he thought of her.

True as the words were (and I knew that, after what I had told him, nothing else was true of her), they forced a groan from me.

"Poor devil!" he said at that. And then again, "Poor devil, it is a shame! It is a black shame, my lad," he continued warmly, "and I would like to see madam at the cart-tail; and that is where I shall see her before all is done! I never heard of such a vixen! But for you," and on the word he paused and looked at me, "you did it, my friend, and I do not see your way out of it."

"Then must I hang?" I cried desperately.

He did not answer.

"My lord! My lord!" I urged, for I began to see whither he was tending, and I could have shrieked in terror, "you can do anything."

"I?" he said.

"You! If you would speak to the judge, my lord."

He laughed, without mirth. "He would whip you instead of hanging you," he said contemptuously.

"To the King, then."

"You would thank me for nothing," he answered; and then with a kind of contemptuous suavity, "My friend, in your Ware Academy—where nevertheless you seem to have had your diversions—you do not know these things. But you may take it from me, that I am more than suspected of belonging to the party whose existence Sir Baldwin denies—I mean to the Whigs; and the suspicion alone is enough to damn any request of mine."

On that, after staring at him a moment, I did a thing that surprised him, and had he known me

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better a thing that would have surprised him more. For the courage to do it, and to show myself in colours unlike my own, I had to thank neither despair nor fear, though both were present; but a kind of rage that seized me, on hearing him speak in a tone above me, and as if, having heard my story, he was satisfied with the curiosity of it, and would dismiss the subject, and I might go to the gallows. I know now that in so speaking he had not that intent, but that, brought up short by the certainty of my guilt, and the impasse as to helping me in which he stood, he chose that mode of repressing the emotion he felt. I did not understand this, however, and with a bitterness born of the misconception, and in a voice that sounded harsh, and anyone's rather than mine, I burst into a furious torrent of reproaches, asking him if it was only for this he had seen me, and to make a tale. "To make a tale," I cried, "and a jest? One that with the same face with which you send me out to be strangled and rot, and with the same smile, you'll tell, my lord, after supper to Sir Baldwin and your like. Oh, for shame, my lord, for shame!" I cried, passionately, and losing all fear of him in my indignation. "As you may some day be in trouble yourself—for great heads fall as well as low ones in these days, and as little pitied—if you have bowels of compassion, my lord, and a mother to love you——"

He turned on me so swiftly at that word that my anger quailed before his. "Silence!" he cried fiercely. "How dare you, such as you, mention—— But there, fellow—be silent!"

I caught the ring of pain as well as anger in his tone, and obeyed him; though I could not discern what I had said to touch him so sorely. He on his side glowered at me a moment; and so we stood, while hope died within me, and I grew afraid of him again, and a shadow fell on the room as it had already fallen on his face. I waited for nothing now but the word that should send me from his presence, and thought nothing so certain as that I had flung away

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what slender chance remained to me. It was with a start that when he broke the silence I was aware of a new sound in his voice.

"Listen, my lad," he said in a constrained tone—and he did not look at me. "You are right in one thing. If I meant to do nothing for you, I had no right to your confidence. I do not know what it was in your face induced me to see you. I wish I had not. But since I have I must do what I can to save you, and there is only one way. Mind you," he continued in a sudden burst of anger, "I do not like it! And I do it out of regard for myself, not for you, my lad! Mind you that!"

"Oh, my lord!" I cried, ready to fall down and worship him.

"Be silent," he answered coldly, "and when my back is turned go through that window. Do you understand? It is all I can do for you. The alley on the left leads to the stables. Pass through them boldly; if you are not stopped you will in a minute be on the high road. The turn, to the left at the cross-roads, leads to Tottenham and London. That on the right will take you to Little Parndon and Epping. That is all I have to say; while I look for a piece of paper to sign your commitment, you would do well to go. Only remember, my man, if you are retaken—do not look to me."

He suited the action to the words by turning his back on me, and beginning to search in a bureau that stood beside him. But so sudden and so unexpected was the proposal he had made, that though he had said distinctly "Go!" I doubt if, apart from the open window, I should have understood his purpose. As it was I came to it slowly—so slowly that he lost patience, and with his head still buried among the pigeon-holes, swore at me.

"Are you going?" he said. "Or do you think that it is nothing I am doing for you? Do you think it is nothing that I am going to tell a lie for such as you? Either go or hang, my lad!"

I heard no more. A moment earlier nothing had

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been farther from my thoughts than to attempt to escape, but the impulse of his will steadied my wavering resolution, and with set teeth and a beating heart I stepped through the window. Outside I turned to the left along a shady green alley fenced by hedges of yew, and espying the stable-yard before me, walked boldly across it. By good luck the grooms and helpers were at supper, and I saw only one man standing at a door. He stared at me, mouthing a straw, but said nothing, and in a twinkling I had passed him, left the curtilage behind me, and had the park fence and gate in sight.

Until I reached this, not knowing whose eyes were on me, I had the presence of mind to walk, though cold shivers ran down my back, and my hair crept, and every second I fancied—for I was too nervous to look back—that I felt Dyson's hand on my collar.

Arriving safely at the gate; however, and the road stretching before me with no one in sight, I took to my heels, and ran a quarter of a mile along it; then leaping the fence that bounded it on the right, I started recklessly across country, my aim being to strike the Little Parndon highway, to which my lord had referred, at a point beyond the cross-roads, and so to avoid passing the latter.

I am aware that this mode of escape, this walking through a window and running off unmolested, sounds bald and commonplace, and that if I could import into my story some touch of romance or womanish disguise, such as—to compare great things with small—marked my Lord Nithsdale's escape from the Tower three years ago, I should cut a better figure. Whereas in a flight across the fields on a quiet afternoon, with the sun casting long shadows on the meadows, and for my most instant alarms, the sudden whirring up before me of partridge or plover, few will find anything heroic. But let them place themselves for a moment in my skin, and remember that as I sweated and panted and stumbled and rose again, as I splashed in reckless haste through sloughs and ditches, and tore my way through great

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blackthorns, I had death always at my heels ! Let them remember that in the long shadows that crossed my path I saw the gallows, and again the gallows, and once more the gallows ; and fled more quickly ; and that it needed but the distant bark of a dog, or the shout of a boy scaring birds, to persuade me that the hue and cry was coming, and to fill me with the last extremity of fear.

I believe that the adventurer and the knight of the road, when it falls to their lot to be so hunted—as must often happen, though more commonly such an one is taken *securus et ebrius* in the arms of his mistress—find some mitigation of their pains in the anticipation of conflict, and in the stern joy which the resolve to sell life dearly imparts to the man of action. But I was unarmed, and worn out with my exertions ; no soldier, and with no heart to fight. My flight therefore across the quiet fields was pure terror, the torture of unmitigated fear. Fear spurred me and whipped me ; and yet, had I known it, I might have spared my terror. For darkness found me, weak and exhausted, but still free, in the neighbourhood of Epping, in Essex, where I passed the night in the forest ; and before noon next day, believing that they would watch for me on the Tottenham Road, I had found courage to slink into London by way of Chingford, and in the heart of that great city, whose magnitude exceeded all my expectations, had safely and effectually lost myself.

CHAPTER X

At this point it becomes me to pause. I set out, the reader will remember, to furnish such a narrative of the events attending my first meeting with my honoured patron, as taken with a brief account of myself might enable all to peruse with insight as well as advantage the details of my later connection with him. And this being done, and bearing in mind that Sir John Fenwick did not suffer for his

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conspiracy until 1696, and that consequently a period of thirteen years divided the former events, which I have related, from those which follow—and which have to do, as I intimated at the outset, with my lord's alleged cognisance of that conspiracy—some may, and with impatience, look to me to proceed at once to the gist of the matter. Which I propose to do; but first to crave the reader's indulgence, while in a very hasty and perfunctory manner I trace my humble fortunes in the interval; whereby time will in the end be saved.

That arriving in London, as I have related, a fugitive, penniless and homeless, in fear of the law, I contrived to keep out of the beadle's hands, and was neither whipped for a vagrant at Bridewell nor starved outright in the streets, I attribute to most singular good fortune; which not only rescued me (*statim*) from a great and instant danger that all but engulfed me, but within a few hours found for me honest and constant employment, and that of an uncommon kind.

It so happened that, perplexed by the clamour of the great city, wherein all faces were new to me and all ways alike, I came to a stand about noon in the neighbourhood of Newgate Market; where, confident that in the immense and never-ceasing tide of life that ebbs and flows in that quarter I was safe from recognition, I ventured to sell an undergarment in a small shop in an alley, and, buying a loaf with the price, satisfied my hunger. But the return of strength was accompanied by no return of hope; rather, my prime necessity supplied, I felt the forlornness of my position more acutely. In which condition, having no resource but to wander aimlessly from one street to another while the daylight lasted—and after that no prospect at all except to pass the night in the same manner—I came presently into Little Britain, and stopped, as luck would have it, before one of the bookshops that crowd that part. A number of persons were poring over the books, and I joined them; but I had not stood a

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moment, idly scanning the backs of the volumes, before one of my neighbours touched my elbow, and when I turned and met his eyes, nodded to me. "A scholar?" he said, smiling pleasantly through a pair of glasses. "Ah, how ill does the muse requite her worshippers. From the country, my friend?"

I answered that I was; and seeing him to be a man well on in years, clad in good broadcloth, and of a sober, substantial aspect, I saluted him abjectly.

"To be sure," he said, again nodding cheerfully. "And a stranger to the town, I expect?"

"Yes," I said.

"And a reader? A reader? Ah, how ill does the muse—— But you *can* read?" he ejaculated, breaking off somewhat suddenly.

I said I could, and to convince him read off the names of several of the volumes before me. I remembered afterwards that instead of looking at them to see if I read aright, he kept his eyes on my face.

"Good!" he said, stopping me when I had deciphered half a dozen. "You do your schoolmaster credit, my lad. Such a man should not want, and yet you look—frankly, my friend, are you in need of employment?"

He asked the question with so much benevolence, and looked at me with so good-natured a twinkle in his eyes, that my tears nearly overflowed, and I had much ado to answer him. "Yes," I said. "And without friends, sir."

"Indeed, indeed," quoth he. "Well, I must do what I can. And first, you may do me a service, which in any case shall not go unrequited. Come this way."

Without waiting for an answer he led me into the mouth of a court hard by, where we were less open to observation; there, pointing to a shop at a little distance from that at which he had found me, he explained that he wished to purchase a copy of "Selden's Baronage" that stood at the front of the stall, but that the tradesman knew him and would overcharge him. "So do you go and buy it for me, my friend," he continued, chuckling over his

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innocent subterfuge with a simplicity that took with me immensely. "It should be half a guinea. There is a guinea"—and he lugged one out. "Buy the book and bring the change to me, and it shall be something in your pocket. Alas, that the muse should so ill—— But there, go, go, my lad," he continued, "and remember 'Selden's Baronage,' half a guinea. And not a penny more!"

Delighted with the luck which had found me such a patron, and anxious to acquit myself to the best advantage, I hurried to do his bidding, first making sure that I knew where to find him. The shop he had pointed out, which was surmounted by the sign of a gun, and appeared to enjoy no small share of public favour, was full of persons reading and talking; but almost the first book on which my eyes alighted was "Selden's Baronage," and the tradesman when I applied to him made no difficulty about the price, saying at once that it was half a guinea. I handed him my money, and without breaking off his talk with a customer, he was counting the change, when something in my aspect struck him, and he looked at the guinea. On which he muttered an oath and thrust it back into my hand.

"It will not do," he said angrily. "Begone!"

I was quite taken aback: the more as several persons looked up from their books, and his immediate companion, a meagre, dry-looking man in a snuff-coloured suit, fell to staring at me. "What do you mean?" I stammered.

"You know very well," the tradesman answered me roughly. "And had better be gone! And more, I tell you, if you want a hemp collar, my man, you are in the way to get one!"

"Clipped?" quoth the dry-looking man.

"New clipped and bright at the edges!" the bookseller answered. "Now go, my man, and be thankful I don't send for a constable."

At that I shrank away, two or three of the customers coming to the door to see me out, and watching which way I turned. This, I suppose—though I was then,

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and for a little time longer in doubt about him—was the reason why I could see nothing of my charitable friend, when I returned to the place where I had left him. I looked this way and that, but he was gone; and though, uncertain what to do, and having the guinea in my possession, I lingered about the mouth of the court for an hour or more, looking for him, he did not return.

At the end of that time the meagre dry man whom I had seen in the shop passed with a book under his arm; and seeing me, after a moment's hesitation stood and spoke to me. "Well, my friend?" said he, looking hard at me. "Are you waiting for the halter?"

I told him civilly, no; but that the gentleman who had given me the guinea to change had bidden me return to him there.

"And he is not here?" he said, with a sneer.

"No," I said.

He stared at me, wondering at the simplicity of my answer; and then, "Well, you are either the biggest fool or the biggest knave within the bills!" he exclaimed. "Are you straight from Gotham?"

"No," I told him. "From the north." And that I wanted employment.

"You are like to get it—at the Plantations!" he answered savagely, taking snuff. I remarked that neither his hands nor his linen were of the cleanest, and that the former were stained with ink. "What are you?" he continued, presently, in the same snappish, churlish tone.

I told him a schoolmaster.

"*Exempli gratiâ*," he answered quickly, and turning to the nearest stall, he indicated the title-page of a book. "Read me that, Master Schoolmaster."

I did so. He grunted; and then, "You write? Show me your hand."

I said I had no ink or paper there, but that if he would take me—

"Pooh, man, are you a fool?" he cried impatiently. "Show me your right hand, middle finger, and I

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will find you *scribit* or *non scribit*. So!—and you want work?"

"Yes," I said.

"Hard work and little pay?"

I said I wanted to make my living.

"Ay, and maybe the first time you come to me you will cut my throat and rob my desk," he answered gruffly. "H'm! That touches you home, does it? However, ask for me to-morrow, at seven in the forenoon—Mr. Timothy Brome, at the sign of the Black Boy in Fleet Street."

Now I was overjoyed indeed. With such a prospect of employment, it seemed to me a small thing that I must pass the night in the streets; but even that I escaped. For when he was about to part from me he asked me what money I had. None, I told him, "except the clipped guinea."

"And I suppose you expect me to give you a shilling earnest?" he answered, irascibly. "But no, no—Timothy Brome is no fool. See here," he continued, slapping his pocket and looking shrewdly at me, "that guinea is not worth a groat to you, except to hang you."

"No," I said, ruefully.

"Well, I will give you five shillings for it, as gold, mind you, as gold, and not to pass. Are you content?"

"It is not mine," I said doubtfully.

"Take it or leave it," he said, screwing up his eyes, and so plainly pleased with the bargain he was driving that I had no inkling of the kind heart that underlay that crabbed manner. "Take it or leave it, my man."

Thus pressed, and my mind retaining no real doubt of the knavery of the man who had entrusted the guinea to me, I handed it to my new friend, and received in return a crown. And this being my last disposition of money not my own, I think it a fit season to record that from that day to this I have been enabled by God's help and man's kindness to keep the eighth commandment; and earning honestly

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what I have spent have been poor, but never a beggar.

In gratitude for which, and both those good men now being dead, I here conjoin the names of Mr. Timothy Brome, of Fleet Street, newsmonger and author, whose sharp tongue and morose manners cloaked a hundred benefactions, and of Charles, Duke of Shrewsbury, my honoured patron, who never gave but his smile doubled the gift which his humanity dictated.

The reader will believe that punctually on the morrow I went with joy and thankfulness to my new master, whom I found up three pairs of stairs in a room barely furnished, but heaped in every part with piles of manuscripts and dog's-eared books, all so covered with dust that type and script were alike illegible. He wore a dingy morning gown, and had laid aside his wig; but the air of importance with which he nodded to me, and a sort of dignity that clothed him as he walked to and fro on the ink-stained floor, mightily impressed me, and drove me to wonder what sort of trade was carried on here. He continued for some minutes after I entered to declaim one fine sentence after another, rolling the long words over his tongue with a great appearance of enjoyment; a process which he only interrupted to point me to a stool and desk, and cry with averted eyes—lest he should cut the thread of his thoughts—
“Write!”

On my hesitating, “Write!” he repeated, in the tone of one commanding a thousand troopers. And then he spoke thus—and as he spoke I wrote:—

“This day His Gracious Majesty, whose health appears to be completely restored, went, accompanied by the French Ambassador and a brilliant company, to take the air in the Mall. Despatches from Holland say that the Duke of Monmouth has arrived at the Hague, and has been well received. Letters from the West say that the city of Bristol having a well-founded confidence in the Royal clemency has hastened to lay its Charter at His

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Majesty's feet. The 30th of the month began the Sessions at the Old Bailey, and held the first and second of this; where seventeen persons received sentence of death, nine to be burned in the hand, seven to be transported, and eleven ordered to be whipped. Yesterday, or this day, a commission was sealed appointing the Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys——"

CHAPTER XI

IN a word, my master was a writer of news-letters, and in that capacity was possessed of so excellent a style and so great a connection in the Western Counties that, as he was wont to boast, there was hardly a squire or rector from Bristol to Dawlish that did not owe what he knew of His Majesty's gout, or Mr. Dryden's last play, to his weekly epistles. The Popish Plot, which had cost the lives of Lord Stafford and many of his persuasion—no less than the Rye House Plot, which by placing the Whigs at the mercy of the Government had at once afforded those their revenge and illustrated the ups and downs of Court life—had given so sharp a stimulus to the appetite for news, that of late he had found himself unable to cope with it. In this unsettled condition, and meditating changes which should belittle Sir Roger and the *London Mercury*, and oust print from the field, he fell in with me; and where another man would have selected a bachelor whose cassock and scarf might commend him at Wills' or Childs', his eccentric kindness snatched me from the gutter, and set me on a tall stool, there to write all day for the detestation of country houses and mayors' parlours.

I remember that at first it seemed to me so easy a trick (this noting the news of the day in plain round hand) that I wondered they paid him to do it, more than another. But besides that I then had knowledge of one side of the business only, I mean the framing the news, but none of the manner in which it was collected at Garraway's and the Cockpit, the

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Sessions House, the Mall, and the Gallery at Whitehall, I presently learned that even of the share that fell to my lot I knew only as much as a dog that turns the spit knows of the roasting of meat. For when my employer, finding me docile and industrious—as I know I was, being thankful for such a haven, and crushed in spirit not only by the dangers through which I had passed, but also by my mistress's treachery—when, I say, he left me one day to my devices, merely skimming through a copy and leaving me to multiply it, with, for sole guide, the list of places to which the letters were to go, as Bridgewater, Whig; Bath, Tory; Bridport, Tory; Taunton, Whig; Frome, Whig; Lyme, Whig; and so on, I came very far short of success. True, when he returned in the evening I had my packets ready and neatly prepared for the mail, which then ran to the West thrice a week, and left next morning; and I had good hopes that he would send them untouched. But great was my dismay when he fell into a rage over the first he picked up, and asked me bluntly if I was quite a fool.

I stammered some answer, and asked in confusion what was the matter.

"Everything," he said. "Here, let me see! Why, you dolt and dunderhead, you have sent letters in identical terms to Frome and Bridport!"

"Yes," I said faintly.

"But the one is Whig and the other is Tory!" he cried.

"But the news, sir," I made bold to answer, "is the same."

"Is it?" he cried in fine contempt. "Why you are a natural! I thought you had learned something by this time. Here, where is the Frome letter? "*"The London Gazette" announces that His Majesty has been graciously pleased to reward my Lord Rochester's services at the Treasury Board by raising him to the dignity of Lord President of the Council, an elevation which renders necessary his resignation of his seat at the Board.*" Tut-tut! That is the Court tone. Here, out with it, and write:—

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“ ‘The Earl of Rochester’s removal from the Treasury Board to the Presidency of the Council, which is announced in the “Gazette,” is very well understood. His lordship made what resistance he could, but the facts were plain, and the King could do no otherwise. Rumour has it that the sum lost to the country in the manner already hinted exceeds fifty thousand guineas.’

“There—what comes next? ‘Letters from the Continent have it that strong recommendations have been made to the Court at the Hague to dismiss the D—— of M——, and it is confidently expected that the next packet will bring the news of his departure.’ Pooh, out with it. Write this:—

“ ‘The D—— of M—— is still at the Hague, where he is being sumptuously entertained. Much is made of His Majesty’s anger, but the D—— is well supplied with money from an unknown source, which some take to be significant. At a ball given by their Highnesses on the eleventh, he danced an English country dance with the Lady Mary, wherein his grace and skill won all hearts.’

“That is better. And now what next? ‘This day an Ambassador from the King of Siam in the East Indies waited on His Majesty with great marks of respect.’ Umph! Well, leave it, but add, ‘Ah, si sic propius.’

“And then, ‘There are rumours that His Majesty intends to call a parliament shortly, in which plan he is hindered only by the state of his gout.’

“Out with that and write this: ‘In the city is much murmuring that a parliament is not called. Though His Majesty has not played lately at tennis, he showed himself yesterday in Hyde Park, so that some who maintain his health to be the cause deserve no weight. In his company were His Highness the Duke of York and the French Ambassador.’

“There, you fool,” my master continued, flinging two-thirds of the packets back to me. “You will have to amend these, and another time you will know better.”

Which showed me that I had still something to learn; and that as there are tricks in all trades, so

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Mr. Timothy Brome, the writer, did not enjoy without reason the reputation of the most popular news-vendor in London. But as I addressed myself to the business with zeal, I presently began to acquire a mastery over his methods; and my knowledge of public affairs growing with each day's work, as in such an employment it could not fail to grow, I was able before very long to take the composition of the letters in a great measure off his hands, leaving him free to walk Change Alley and the coffee-houses, where his snuff-coloured suit and snappish wit were as well known as his secret charity was little suspected.

In private, indeed, he was of so honest a disposition, his faults of temper notwithstanding, as to cause me at first some surprise, since I fancied an incompatibility between this and the laxity of his public views; which he carried so far that he was not only a political sceptic himself, but held all others to be the same, maintaining that the best public men were only of this or that colour because it suited their pockets or ambitions, and that, of all, he respected most Lord Halifax and his party, who at least trimmed openly, and never cried loudly for either extreme.

But as his actions in other matters bettered his professions, so I presently found that in this too he belied himself, which was made clear when it came to the test. For the death of King Charles II occurring soon after I came to serve him—so soon that I still winced when my former life was probed, and hated a woman and trembled at sight of a constable, and wondered if this were really *I*, who went to and fro daily from my garret in Bride Lane to St. Dunstan's—the death, I say, of the King occurring just at that time, we were speedily overwhelmed by a rush of events so momentous and following so quickly one on another that they threw the old seesaw of Court and country off its balance, and upset with it the minds of many who had hitherto clung firmly to a party. For the King had been scarcely laid very quietly—some thought meanly—in his

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grave and the Duke of York been proclaimed by the title of James the Second, when those, who had fled the country in the last reign, either after the Rye House Plot, or later with Monmouth, returned and kindled two great insurrections, that of the Marquess of Argyle in the North, and that of the Duke of Monmouth in the West. Occurring almost simultaneously, it was wonderful to see how, in spite of the cry of a Popish King, and the Protestant religion in danger, which the rebels everywhere raised, these outbreaks rallied all prudent folk to the King, whose popularity never, before or afterwards, stood so high as on the day of the Battle of Sedgmoor.

And doubtless he might have retained the confidence and affection of his people, and by these means attained to the utmost of his legitimate wishes—I mean the relief of the papists from penal clauses if not from civil disabilities—had he gone about it discreetly, and with the moderation which so delicate a matter required. But in the outset the severity with which the western rebels were punished, both by the military after the rout and by the Lord Chief Justice at the assizes which followed, gave check to his popularity; and thenceforth for three years all went one way. The Test Acts, abrogated at the first in a case here and there (yet ominously in such, in particular, as favoured the admission of papists to the army) were presently nullified, with other acts of a like character, by a general declaration of indulgence; and that, to the disgust of the clergy, to be read in the churches. To this main assault on the passive obedience which the Church had so often preached, and to which it still fondly clung, were added innumerable meaner attacks perhaps more humiliating, as the expulsion of the Protestant Fellows from Magdalene College, the conversion of University College into a Romish Seminary, and the dismissal of my Lords Rochester and Clarendon, the King's brothers-in-law, from all their places because—as was everywhere rumoured—they would not resign the creed in which they had been born.

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It were long to recount all the other errors into which the King fell, but I may lay stress on the dissolution of a most loyal Parliament because it would not legalise his measures, on the open and shameless attempt to pack its successor, on the corruption of the judges, and on the trial of the seven bishops for sedition. It were shorter and equally to the point to say that an administration conducted for three years on these lines sufficed not only to sap the patient loyalty of the nation, but to rouse from its rest the political conscience of my employer. Mr. Brome, after much muttering and many snappish corrections and alterations, all tending (as I soon perceived) to Whiggery resigned, on the day the Fellows of Magdalene were expelled, his time-honoured system of duplicity; and thenceforth, until the end, issued the same letter to Tory squire and Whig borough alike.

What was more remarkable, and, had the King known it, might have served his obstinate Majesty for a warning, we lost no patrons by the step, but rather increased our readers, the whole nation by this time being of one mind. When the end came, therefore, and in answer to the famous Invitation signed by the Seven, "the Deliverer," as the Whig party still love to call him, landed at Torbay, and with scarcely a blow, and no life lost, entered London, there were few among those who ruffled it in his train, as he rode to St. James's, who had done as much to bring him to his throne as my master; though he, good, honest man, wore neither spurs nor sword, and stood humbly afoot in the mouth of an alley to see the show go by.

CHAPTER XII

I SUPPOSE that there never was an abrupt change in the government of a nation more quietly, successfully, and bloodlessly carried through than our great Revolution. But it is the way of the pendulum to swing back, and it was not long before those who

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had been most deeply concerned in the event began to reflect and compare; nor, as they had before them the example of the Civil War and the subsequent restoration, and were persons bred for the most part in an atmosphere of Divine Right and passive obedience (whether they had imbibed those doctrines or not), was it wonderful if a proportion of them began to repent at leisure what they had done in haste. The late King's harsh and implacable temper, and the severity with which he had suppressed one rising, were not calculated to reassure men when they began to doubt. The possibility of his return hung like a thick cloud over the more timid, while the favours which the new King showered on his Dutchmen, the degradation of the coin and of trade, and the many disasters that attended the first years of the new government, were sufficient to shake the confidence and chill the hearts even of the stoutest and most patriotic.

So bad was the aspect of things that it was rumoured that King William would abdicate, and this aggravating the general uncertainty, many in high places spent their days in a dreadful looking forward to judgment; nor ever, I believe, slept without dreaming of Tower Hill, the axe, and the sawdust. The result that was natural followed. While many hastened to make a secret peace with St. Germain's, others, either as a matter of conscience or because they felt they had offended too deeply, remained constant; but perceiving treachery in the air, and being in daily fear of invasion, breathed nothing but threats and slaughter against the seceders. This begot a period of plots and counter-plots, of perjury and intrigue, of denunciations and accusations real and feigned, such as I believe no other country has ever known; the Jacobites considering a restoration certain, and the time only doubtful; while the Whigs in their hearts were inclined to agree with them, and feared the worst.

During seven such years I lived and worked with Mr. Brome, who, partly, I think, because he had come late to his political bearings, and partly because the Tories and Jacobites had a newswriter in the notorious

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Mr. Dyer—to whose letters Mr. Dryden, it was said, would sometimes contribute—remained steadfast in his Whig opinions, and did no little in the country parts to lessen the stir which the Nonjurors' complaints created. I saw much of him and little of others; and being honestly busy and honourably employed—not that my style made any noise in the coffee-houses, which was scarcely to be expected, since it passed for Mr. Brome's—I began to regard my life before I came to London as an ugly dream. Yet it had left me with two proclivities which are not common at the age which I had then reached; the one a love of solitude and a retired life, which, a matter of necessity at first, grew by and bye into a habit; the other an averseness from women that amounted almost to a fear of them. Mr. Brome, who was a confirmed bachelor, did nothing to alter my views on either point, or to reconcile me to the world; and as my life was passed between my attic in Bride Lane and his apartment in Fleet Street, where he had a tolerable library, few were better acquainted with public affairs, or had less experience of private than I; or knew more intimately the order of the signs and the aspect of the houses between the Fleet Prison and St. Dunstan's Church.

Partly out of fear, and partly out of a desire to be done with my former life, I made myself known to no one in Hertfordshire, but, some five years after my arrival in London, having a sudden craving to see my mother, I walked down one Sunday to Epping. There, making cautious inquiries of the Bishop Stortford carrier, I heard of her death, and on the return journey burst once into a great fit of weeping at the thought of some kind word or other she had spoken to me on a remembered occasion. But with this tribute to nature I dismissed my family, and even that good friend, from my mind; going back to my lodging with a contentment which this glimpse of my former life wondrously augmented.

Of Mr. D—— or of the wicked woman who had deceived me I was not likely to hear, but there was

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one, and he the only stranger who *ante Londinium* had shown me kindness, whose name my pen was frequently called on to transcribe, and whose fame was even in those days in all men's mouths. With a thrill of pleasure I heard that my Lord Shrewsbury had been one of the seven who signed the famous invitation: then that the King had named him one of the two Secretaries of State; and again, after two years, during which his doings filled more and more of the public ear—so that he stood for the Government—that he had suddenly and mysteriously resigned all his offices and retired into the country. Later still, in the same year, in the sad days which followed the defeat of Beachy Head, when a French fleet sailed the Channel, and in the King's absence, the most confident quailed, I heard that he had ridden post to Kensington to place his sword and purse at the Queen's feet; and, later still, in 1694, when three years of silence had obscured his memory, I heard with pleasure, and the world with surprise, that he had accepted his old office, and stood higher than ever in the King's favour.

The next year Queen Mary died. This, as it left only the King's life between the Jacobites and a restoration, increased as well their activity as the precautions of the Government, whose most difficult task lay in sifting the wheat from the chaff and discerning between the fictions of a crowd of false witnesses (who thronged the Secretary's office and lived by this new trade) and the genuine disclosures of their own spies and informers. In the precarious position in which the Government stood, ministers dared neglect nothing, nor even stand on scruples. In moments of alarm, therefore, it was no uncommon thing to close the gates and prosecute a house to house search for Jacobites, the most notorious being seized and the addresses of the less dangerous taken. One of these searches which surprised the city in the month of December, '95, had for me results so important that I may make it the beginning of a consecutive narrative.

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I happened to be sitting in my attic that evening over a little coal fire, putting into shape some Whig reflections on the Coinage Bill, our news-letter tending more and more to take the form of a pamphlet. A frugal supper, long postponed, stood at my elbow, and the first I knew of the search that was afoot, a man without warning opened my door, which was on the latch, and thrust in his head.

Naturally I rose in alarm, and we stared at one another by the light of my one candle. Only the intruder's head and shoulders were in the room, but I could see that he wore bands and a cassock, and a great bird's-nest wig, which overhung a beak-like nose and bright eyes.

"Sir," said he, after a moment's pause, during which the eyes leaving me glittered to every part of the room, "I see you are alone, and have a very handy curtain there."

I gasped, but to so strange an exordium had nothing to say. The stranger nodded at that as if satisfied, and slowly edging his body into the room, disclosed to my sight the tallest and most uncouth figure imaginable. A long face ending in a tapering chin added much to the grotesque ugliness of his aspect; in spite of which his features wore a smirk of importance, and though he breathed quickly, like a man pressed and in haste, it was impossible not to see that he was master of himself.

And of me; for when I went to ask his meaning, he shot out his great under-lip at me, and showed me the long barrel of a horse-pistol that he carried under his cassock. I recoiled.

"Good sir," he said, with an ugly grin, "'tis an argument I thought would have weight with you. To be short, I have to ask your hospitality. There is a search for Jacobites; at any moment the messengers may be here. I live opposite to you, and am a Nonjuring clergyman liable to suspicion; you are a friend of Mr. Timothy Brome, who is known to stand well with the Government. I propose, therefore, to hide behind the curtain of your bed.

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Your room will not be searched, nor shall I be found if you play your part. If you fail to play it—then I shall be taken; but you, my dear friend, will not see it.”

He said the last words with another of his hideous grins, and tapped the barrel of his pistol with so much meaning that I felt the blood leave my cheeks. He took this for a proof of his prowess, and, nodding, as well content, he stood a moment in the middle of the floor, and listened, with the tail of his eye on me.

He had no reason to watch me, however, for I was unarmed and cowed; nor had we stood many seconds before a noise of voices and weapons with the trampling of feet broke out on the stairs, and at once confirmed his story and proved the urgency of his need. Apparently he was aware of the course things would take, and that the constables and messengers would first search the lower floors; for, instead of betaking himself forthwith to his place of hiding—as seemed natural—he looked cunningly round the chamber, and bade me sit down to my papers. “Do you say at once that you are Mr. Brome’s writer,” he continued with an oath, “and mark me well, my man—betray me by a word or sign, and I strew your brains on the floor!”

After that threat, and though he went then, and hid his hateful face—which already filled me with fear and repugnance beyond words—behind the curtain, where between bed and wall there was a slender space, I had much ado to keep my seat and my self-control. In the silence which filled the room I could hear his breathing, and I felt sure that the searchers must hear it also when they entered. Assured that the Sancrofts and Kens, and the honest but misguided folk who followed them, did not carry pistols, I gave no credit to his statement that he was a Nonjuring parson; but deemed him some desperate highwayman or plotter, whose presence in my room, should he be discovered, and should I by good luck escape his malice, would land me at the best in Bridewell or the Marshalsea. By and bye the candle-wick

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grew long, and terrified at the prospect of being left in the dark with him, I went to snuff it. With a savage word he whispered me to let it be, after which I had no choice but to sit in fear and semi-darkness, listening to the banging of doors below, and the alternate rising and falling of voices, as the search party entered or issued from the successive rooms.

In my chamber, with its four white-washed walls and few sticks of furniture, there was only one place where a man could stand and be unseen, and that was behind the curtain. There, I thought, the most heedless messenger must search; and as I listened to the steps ascending the last flight I was in agony. I foresaw the moment when the constable would carelessly and perfunctorily draw the curtain—and then the flash, the report, the cry, the mad struggle up and down the room, which would follow.

So strong was this impression that, although I had been waiting minutes when the summons came and a hand struck my door, I could not at first find voice to speak. The latch was up and the door half open when I cried "Enter!" and rose.

In the doorway appeared three or four faces, a couple of lanterns, held high, and a gleam of pike-heads. "Richard Price, servant to Mr. Broome, the newswriter," cried one of the visitors, reading in a sonorous voice from a paper.

"Well affected," answered a second—evidently the person in command. "Brome is a good man. I know him. No one is hidden here?"

"No," I said, with a loudness and boldness that surprised me.

"No lodger, my man?"

"None!"

"Right!" he answered. "Good-night, and God save King William!"

"Amen!" quoth I; and then, and not before, my knees began to shake.

However, it no longer mattered, for before I could believe that the danger was over they were gone and had closed the door; and I caught a sniggering laugh

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behind the curtain. Still, they had gone no further than the stairs; I heard them knock on the opposite door and troop in there, and I caught the tones of a woman's voice, young and fresh, answering them. But in a minute they came out again, apparently satisfied, and crowded downstairs; whereon the man behind the curtain laughed again, and swaggering out, Bobadil-like, shook his fist with furious gestures after them.

"Damn your King William, and you too!" he cried out in ferocious triumph. "One of these days God will squeeze him like the rotten orange he is; and if God will not, I will! I, Robert Ferguson! Trot, for the set of pudding-headed, blind-eyed moles that you are! Call yourselves constables! Bah! But as for you, my friend, he continued," turning to me and throwing his pistol with a crash on the table, "you have more spunk than I thought you had, and spoke up like a gentleman of mettle. There is my hand on it!"

My throat was so dry that I could not speak, but I gave him my hand.

He gripped it and threw it from him with a boastful gesture, and, stalking to the farther side of the room and back again, "There!" cried he. "Now you can say that you have touched hands with Ferguson, the famous Ferguson, the Ferguson on whose head a thousand guineas have been set! Ferguson the king-maker, who defied three kings and made three kings and will yet make a fourth! Fire and furies! Do a set of boozing tipstaves think to take the man who outwitted Jeffreys and slipped through Kirke's lambs?"

Hearing who he was, I stared at him in astonishment; but in astonishment largely leavened with fear and hatred; for I knew the reputation he enjoyed, and both what he had done and of what he was suspected. That in all his adventures and intrigues he had borne a charmed life; that where Sidney and Russell, Argyle and Monmouth, Rumbold and Ayloff, had suffered on the scaffold, he had

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escaped scot free was one thing and certain ; but that men accounted for this in strange ways was another scarcely less assured. While his friends maintained that he owed his immunity to a singular skill in disguise, his enemies, and men who were only so far his enemies as they were the enemies of all that was most base in human nature, asserted that this had little to do with it, but went so far as to say that in all his plots, with Russell and with Monmouth, with Argyle and with Ayloff, he had played booty, and played the traitor ; and tempting men, and inviting men to the gibbet, had taken good care to go one step farther—and by betraying them to secure his own neck from peril !

CHAPTER XIII

SUCH was the man I saw before me ; on whose face, as if Heaven purposed to warn his fellows against him, malignant passion and an insane vanity were so plainly stamped that party spirit must have gone to lengths, indeed, before it rendered men blind to his quality. His shambling gait seemed a fitting conveyance for a gaunt, stooping figure so awkward and uncouth that when he gave way to gesticulation it seemed to be moved by wires ; yet, once he looked askance at you, face and figure were forgotten in the gleam of the eyes that, treacherous and cruel, leered at you from the penthouse of his huge, ill-fitting wig.

Nevertheless, I confess that, while I hated and loathed the man, he cowed me. His latest escape had intoxicated him, and astride on my table, or stalking the floor, he gave way to his vanity. Pouring out a thread of ribald threats and imaginings, he now hinted at the fate which had never failed to befall those who thwarted him ; now he boasted of his cunning and his hundred intrigues, and now he touched, not obscurely, on some great design soon to be executed. His audacity, no less than his frankness, bewildered me ; for if he did not tell me all, he told enough, were it true, to hang a man. Yet I

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soon found that he had method in his madness, for while I listened with a shamefaced air, hating him and meditating informing against him the moment I was freed from his presence, he turned on me with a hideous grin, and thrusting the muzzle of his pistol against my temple, swore with endless curses to slay me if I betrayed him.

"You will go to Brome to-morrow, as usual," he said. "The Whiggish old dotard, I could pluck out his inwards! And you will say not one word of Mr. Ferguson! For, mark me, sirrah Dick, alone or in company, I shall be at your elbow, nor will all Cutts's guards avail to save you! Do you mark me? Then d—— you, down on your knees! Down on your knees, you white-livered dog, and swear by the Gospels you will tell no living soul by tongue or pen that you have seen me."

He pressed the cold steel muzzle to my temple, and I knelt and swore. When it was done, he roared and jeered at me. "You see, I have my oath!" he cried, "as well as Little Hooknose! And no non-jurors! Now say 'Down with King William!'"

I said it.

"Louder! Louder!" he cried.

I could only comply.

"Now, write it! Write it!" he continued, thrusting a piece of paper under my nose, and slapping his huge hand upon it. "I'll have it in black and white! Or write this—ha! ha! that will be better. Are you ready? Write, 'I hereby abjure my allegiance to Prince William.'"

"No," I said faintly, laying down the pen which I had taken up at his bidding. "I will not write it."

"You *will* write it!" he answered in a terrible tone. "And within a very few seconds. Write it at once, sirrah! 'I hereby abjure my allegiance to Prince William!'"

I wrote it with a shaking hand, after a glance at the pistol muzzle.

"And swear that I regard King James as my lawful sovereign. And I undertake to obey the rules

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of the St. Germain's Club, and to forward its interests.' Good! Now sign it."

I did so.

"Date it," cried the tyrant; and when I had done so he snatched the paper from me and flourished it in the air. "There is my passport!" quoth he, with an exultant laugh. "When I am taken that will be taken, and when that is taken the worse for Mr. Richard Price if *he* is taken. He will taste of the hangman's lash. So! You are a clever fellow, Richard Price, but Robert Ferguson is your master, as he has been better men's!"

The man was so much in love with cruelty that even when he had gained his point he could not bear to give up the pleasure of torturing me, and for half an hour he continued to flout and jeer at me, sometimes picturing my fate if the paper fell into the Secretary's hands, and sometimes threatening me with his pistol, and making sport of my alarm. At last, reluctantly, and after many warnings of what would happen to me if I informed, he took himself off; and I heard him go into the opposite room and slam the door.

Be sure I was not long in securing mine after him! I was in a pitiable state of terror; shaking at thought of the man's return, and in an ague when I considered the power over me which the paper I had signed gave him. I could hardly believe that, in so short a time, anything so dreadful had happened to me! Yet it were hard to say whether, with all my terror, I did not hate him more than I feared him; for though at one time my heart was water when I thought of betraying him, at another it glowed with rage and loathing, and to spite him, and to free myself from him, I would risk anything. And as I was not wanting in foresight, and could picture with little difficulty the slavery in which he would hold me from that day forward—and wherein his cruel spirit would delight—it was the latter mood that prevailed with me, and determined my action when morning came.

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Reflecting that I could expect no mercy from him, but had little to fear from the Government if I told my tale frankly, I determined at all risks to go to the Secretary. I would have done so the moment I rose, the thought that at any moment he might burst in upon me keeping me in a cold sweat; but I was prudent enough to abide by my habits, and refrain from anticipating by a second the hour at which it was my custom to descend. I waited in the utmost trepidation, therefore, until half-past seven, when, with a quaking heart, but a mind made up, I ventured down to the street.

It was barely light, but the coffee-houses were open, and between early customers to these, and barbers passing with their curling tongs, and milkmen and hawkers plying morning wares, and apprentices setting out their master's goods, the ways were full and noisy; so that I had no reason to fear pursuit, and in the hubbub gained courage the farther I left my oppressor behind me. Nevertheless, I took the precaution of going first to Mr. Brome's, opposite St. Dunstan's; and passing in there, as was my daily custom, lingered a little in the entry. When by this ruse I had made assurance doubly sure, I slipped out, and through the crowded Strand to Whitehall.

Mr. Brome had a species of understanding with the Government, and on one occasion being ill, had made me his messenger to the Secretary's. I knew the place, therefore, but none the less gave way to timidity when I saw the crowd of ushers, spies, tipstaves, and busybodies that hung about the door of the office, and took curious note of everyone who went in or out. My heart failed me at the sight, and I was already more than half inclined to go away, my business undone, when some one touched my sleeve, and I started and turned. A girl, still in her teens, with a keen and pinched face, and a handkerchief neatly drawn over her head, handed a note to me.

"For me?" I asked.

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"Yes," said she.

I took it on that and opened it, my hands shaking. But when I read the contents, which were these—"Mr. Robert Ferguson's respects to the Secretary, and he has to-day changed his lodging. He will to-morrow be pleased to supply the bearer's character"—I thought I should have fallen to the ground. Nor was my alarm the less for the reflection which immediately arose in my mind that the note had of necessity been written and despatched before I left Mr. Brome's door, and consequently before I had taken any step towards the execution of my design!

Still, what I held was but a piece of paper bearing a message from a man proscribed, who dared not to show his face where I stood. A word to the door-keepers, and I might even now go in and lay my information. But the man's omniscience cowed my spirit, terrified me, and broke me down. Assured after this, that whatever I did or wherever I went he would know and be warned in time, and I gain by my information nothing but the name of a gull or a cheat, I turned from the door. Then seeing that the girl waited, "There is no answer," I said.

"Will you please to go to the gentleman?" quoth she.

My jaw dropped. "God forbid!" I said, beginning to tremble.

"I think you had better," said she.

And this time there was that in her voice roused doubts in me and made me waver—lest what I had done prove insufficient, and he betray me, though I refrained from informing. Sullenly, therefore, and after a moment's thought, I asked her where he was.

"I am not to tell you," she answered. "You can come with me if you please."

"Go on," I said.

She cast a sharp glance at the group about the office, then turned, and walking rapidly north by Charing Cross, led me through St. Martin's Lane and Bedfordbury to Covent Garden. Skirting this,

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she threaded Hart Street and Red Lion Court, and crossing Drury Lane conducted me into Lincoln's Inn Fields, where she turned sharply to the left and through Ralph Court to the Turnstile. Seeing that she lingered here and from time to time looked back, I fancied that we were near our destination; but starting afresh, she led me along Holborn and through Staple Inn. Presently it struck me that we were near Bride Lane, and I cried "He is in my room?"

"Yes," she said gravely, and without explanation. "If he pleases you will find him there." And without more she signed to me to go on, and disappeared herself in the mouth of an alley by Green's Rents.

It did please him. When I entered, with the air, doubtless, of a whipped hound, I found him sitting on my table swinging his legs and humming an air; and with so devilish a look of malice and triumph on his face as sent my heart into my boots. Notwithstanding, for a while it was his humour not to speak to me but to leer at me askance out of the corner of his eyes, and keep me on tenterhooks, expecting what he would say or do; and this he maintained until he had finished his tune, when with a grin he asked after his friend the Secretary.

"Was it Trumbull you saw, or the new duke?" said he, and when I did not answer he roared out an oath, and snatching up the pistol which lay on the table beside him, levelled it at me. "Answer, will you? Do you think that I am to speak twice to such uncovenanted dirt as you? Whom did you see?"

"No one," I stammered, trembling.

"And why not?" he cried. "And why not, you spawn of Satan?"

"I received your note," I said.

"Oh, you received my note!" he whimpered, dropping his voice and mocking my alarm. "Your lordship received my note, did you? And if you had not got my note, you would have informed, would you? You would have informed and sent me to the gallows, would you? Answer! Answer, or——"

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"Yes!" I cried, in an agony of terror, for he was bringing the pistol nearer and nearer to my face, while his finger toyed with the trigger, and at any moment might press it too sharply.

"So! And you tell me that to my face, do you?" he answered, eyeing me so truculently that I held up my hands and backed to the door. "You dare tell me that, do you? Come here, sirrah!"

I hesitated.

"Come here!" he cried. "Or by —— I will shoot you! For the last time, come here!"

I went nearer.

"Oh, but I would like to see you in the boot!" he said. "It would be the finest sight! It would not need a turn of the screw to make you cry out! And, mind you," he continued, suddenly seizing my ear in his great hand, and twisting it until I screamed, "in a boot of some kind or other I shall have you—if you play me false! Do you understand, eh? Do you understand, you sheep in wolf's clothing?"

"Yes!" I cried. "Yes, yes!" He had forced me to my knees, and brought his cruel, sneering face close to mine.

"Very well. Then get up—if you have learned your lesson. You have had one proof that I know more than others. Do not seek another. But, umph—where have I seen you before, Master Trembler?"

I said humbly, my spirit quite broken, that I did not know.

"No?" he answered, staring at me with his face puckered up. "Yet somewhere I have. And some day I shall call it to mind. In the meantime—remember that you are my slave, my dog, my turnspit, to fetch or carry, cry or be merry at my will. You will sleep or wake, go or come as I bid you. And so long as you do that—Richard Price, you shall live. But on the day you play me false, or whisper my name to a living soul—on that day, or within the week, you will hang! Do you hear, hang, you Erastian dog! Hang, and be carrion: with

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Ayloff, and many another good man, that would stint me, and take no warning!"

CHAPTER XIV

ALAS, the secret subjection into which I fell from that day onwards, to a man who knew neither pity nor scruple—and wielded his power with the greater enjoyment and the less remorse for the piquant contrast it afforded to his position, as a proscribed and hunted traitor, in hiding for his life—exceeded all the anticipations of it which I had entertained. Having his favourite lodging in the rooms opposite mine, he was ready, when the cruel humour seized him, to sally forth and mock and torment me; while the privacy of his movements and the number of his disguises (whence it arose that I never knew until I saw him whether he was there or not) kept me in a state of suspense and misery well-nigh intolerable. Yet such was the spell of fear under which he had contrived to lay me—he being a violent and dangerous man and I no soldier—and so crafty were the means, no less than the art, by which he gradually wound a chain about me, that in spite of my hatred I found resistance vain, and for a long time, and until a *deus ex machina*, as the ancients say, appeared on the scene, saw no resource but to bear the yoke and do his bidding.

He had one principal mode of strengthening his hold upon me, which stood the higher in his favour, as besides effecting that object and rendering me serviceable, it amused him with the spectacle of my alarms. This consisted in the employing me in his treasonable designs: as by sending me with letters and messages to Sam's Coffee-house, or to the Dog in Drury Lane, or to more private places where the Jacobites congregated; by making me a go-between to arrange meetings with those of his kidney who dared not stir abroad in daylight, and came and went between London and the coast of France under cover

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of night; or, lastly, by using me to drop treasonable papers in the streets, or fetch the same from the secret press, in a court off St. James's, where they were printed.

He took especial delight in imposing this last task upon me, and in depicting, when I returned fresh from performing it, the penalties to which I had rendered myself liable. It may occur to some that when I passed through the streets with such papers in my hands I had an easy way out of my troubles, and could at any moment by conveying the letters to the Secretary's office procure the tyrant's arrest and my own freedom. But besides the fact that his frequent change of lodging, his excellent information, and the legion of spies who served him, rendered it doubtful whether with the best will in the world the messengers would find him where I had left him, he frequently boasted—and the boast, if unfounded, added to my distrust of all with whom I came in contact—that the very tipsters and officers were in his pay, and that Cutts himself dared not arrest him! Besides, I more than suspected that often the letters he gave me were blank, and the errands harmless: and that the one and the other were feigned only for the purpose of trying me, or out of pure cruelty—to the end that when I returned he might describe with gusto the process of hanging, drawing, and quartering, and gloat over the horror with which I listened to his relation; a practice which he carried to such an extent as more than once to reduce me to tears of rage and anguish.

Such was my life at home, where if my tyrant was not always at my elbow I was every hour obnoxious to his appearance; for early in our connection he forbade me to lock my door. Abroad I was scarcely more easy, seeing that, besides an impression I had that wherever I went I was dogged, there was scarcely an item of news which it fell to my lot to record that did not throw me into a panic. One day it would be Mr. Bear arrested on a charge of high treason, and in possession of I knew not what compromising letters:

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and another, the suicide in the Temple of a gentleman to whom I myself had a week earlier taken a letter, and who had in my presence let fall expressions which led me to think him in the same evil case with me. Another day it would be an announcement that the Government had discovered a new conspiracy, or that letters going for France had been seized in Romney Marshes; or that the Lancashire witnesses were speaking more candidly; or that Dr. Oates had been taken up and held to bail for a misdemeanour. All these and many other rumours punished me in turn, and filling my mind with the keenest apprehensions, must in a short time have rendered my life intolerable.

As it was, Mr. Brome, within a month, saw so great a change in me that he would have me take a holiday, advising me to go afield, either to my relations, or to some village on the Lea, to which neighbourhood Mr. Izaak Walton's book had given a reputation exceeding its deserts. He reinforced the advice with a gift of two guineas, that I might spend the month royally; then in a great hurry added an injunction that I should not waste the money. But I did worse, for I had the simple folly to tell the whole by way of protest and bitter complaint to my other master, who first with a grin took from me the two guineas, and then made himself merry over the increased time I could now place at his disposal.

"And it is timely, Dick, it is timely," he said with ugly pleasantry. "For the good cause, the cause you love so dearly, Dick, is prospering. Another month and you and I know what will happen. Ha! ha! we know. In the meantime, work while it is day, Dick. Put your hand to the plough and look not back. If all were as forward as you, our necks would be in little peril, and we might see a rope without thinking of a cart."

"Curse you!" I cried, beside myself between disappointment and the rage into which his fiendish teasing threw me. "Cannot you keep your tongue off that? Is it not enough that you——"

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"Have taught me to limp!" quoth he, winking hideously. "Here's to Louis, James, Mary, and the Prince—L. I. M. P., my lad! Oh, we can talk the deealect. We have had good teachers."

I could have burst into tears. "Some day you'll be caught!" I cried.

"Well?" he said with a grin. "And what then?"

"You'll be hanged! Hanged!" I cried furiously. "And God grant I may be there to see."

"You will that," he answered with composure. "Make your mind easy, my man, for, trust me, if I am in the first cart, you'll be in the second! That is my security, friend Dick. If I go, you go. Who carried to Mr. Warmaky's chambers the letters from France, I would like to know? And who—— But the cause!" he continued, breaking off, "the cause! To business, and no more havers. Here's work for you. You shall go, do you hear me, Richard, to Covent Garden to the Piazza there, in half an hour's time. It will be full dark then. You will see there a fine gentleman walking up and down, taking his tobacco, with a white handkerchief hanging from his pocket. You will give him that note, and say, 'Roberts and Guiney are good men'—d'ye take it? 'Roberts and Guiney are good men,' say that, and no more, and come back to me."

I answered at first, being in a rage, and not liking this errand better than others I had done for him, that I would not—I would not, though he killed me. But he had a way with him that I could not long resist, and he presently cowed me, and sent me off.

I had so far fallen into his sneaking habits that though it was dark night when I started, I went the farthest way round by Holborn, and the new fashionable quarter, Soho; and passing through King's Square itself, and before the late Duke of Monmouth's house—the sight of which did not lessen my distaste for my errand—I entered Covent Garden by James Street, which comes into the square between the two Piazzas. At the corner I had to turn into the road-way to avoid a party of roisterers who had just issued

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from the Nag's Head coffee-house and were roaring for a coach; and being in the kennel, and observing under the Piazza and before the taverns more lights and link-boys than I liked, I continued along the gutter, dirty as it was (and always is in the neighbourhood of the market), until I was half-way across the square, where I could turn and reconnoitre at my leisure. Here for a moment, running my eye along the Piazza, which had its usual fringe of flower-girls and mumpers, swearing porters, and hackney coaches, I thought my man with the white handkerchief had not come; but shifting my gaze to the Little Piazza, which was darker and less frequented, I presently espied him walking to and fro under cover, with a cane in his hand and the air of a gentleman who had supped and was looking out for a pretty girl. He was a tall, stout man, wearing a large black peruke and a lace cravat and ruffles; and he carried a steel-hilted sword, and had somehow the bearing of one who had seen service abroad.

Satisfied that he was the person I wanted, I went to him; but stepping up to him a little hastily, I gave him a start, I suppose, for he backed from me and laid his hand on his hilt, rapping out an oath. However, a clearer view reassured him, and he cocked his hat and swore at me again, but in a different tone. "Sir," said he very rudely, "another time give a gentleman a wider berth, unless you want his cane about your shoulders!"

For answer I merely pulled out the note I had and held it towards him, being accustomed to such errands, and anxious only to do this one and be gone; the more, as under the Great Piazza a number of persons were loitering, and among them link-boys and chair-men and the like who notice everything.

However, he made no movement to take the letter, but only said, "For me?"

"Yes," I answered.

"From whom?" said he, roughly.

"You will learn that inside," I said. "I was bidden only to say that Roberts and Guiney are good men."

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"Ha!" he exclaimed, "why did you not say that before?" and at that took the letter. On which, having done my part and not liking the neighbourhood, I was for going, and had actually made a half-turn, when a man slighter than the first and taller, came out of the shadow behind him, and, standing by my side, touched his hat to me. I stopped.

"Good evening, my lord," he said, addressing me with ceremony, and a sort of dignity. "I little thought to see you here on this business. It is the best news I have had myself or have had to give to others this many a day. It shall be well represented, and the risk you run. And whatever be thought on this side, believe me, at St. Germain's——"

"Hush!" cried the first man, interrupting him at that, and rather sharply. I think he had been too much surprised to speak before. "You are too hasty, sir," he continued. "There must be a mistake here. The gentleman to whom you are speaking——"

"There is no mistake. This gentleman and I are well acquainted," the other responded coolly, and in the tone of a man who knows what he is doing. And then to me, and with a different air, "My lord, you may not wish to say your name aloud; that I can understand, and this is no very safe place for either of us. But if we could meet somewhere, say at——"

"Hush, sir," the man with the handkerchief cried, and this time almost angrily. "There *is* a mistake here, and in a moment you will say too much, if you have not said it already. This gentleman—if he is a gentleman—brings a letter from R. F., and is no more of a lord, I'll be sworn, than I am!"

"From R. F.?"

"Yes; and therefore if he is the person you think him—— But come, sir," he continued, eyeing me angrily, "what *is* your name? End this."

I did not wish to tell him, yet liked less to refuse. So I lied, and on the spur of the moment said, "Charles Taylor," that being the name of a man who lived below me.

The taller man struck one hand into the other.

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"There! Charles!" he cried, and looked at me smiling. "I have an eye for faces, and if you are not——"

"Nay, sir, I pray, be quiet," the man with the white handkerchief remonstrated. "Or if you are so certain——" and then he looked hard at me and frowned as if he began to feel a doubt. "Step this way and tell me what you think. This gentleman will doubtless excuse us, and wait a moment, whether he be whom you think him or not."

I was as uneasy and as unwilling to stay as could be, but the man's tone was resolute, and I saw that he was not a man to cross, so with an ill grace I consented, and the two, drawing aside together into the deeper shadow under the Piazza, began to confer. This left me to kick my heels impatiently and watch out of the corner of my eye the loiterers under the other Piazza, to learn if any observed us. Fortunately they were taken up with a quarrel which had just broken out between two hackney coachmen, and though a man came near me, bringing a woman, he had no eyes for me, and, calling a sedan-chair, went away again almost immediately.

I was so engrossed with watching on that side and taking everyone who looked towards me for an informer, that it was with a kind of shock that I found my two friends had grown in the course of their conference to three; nor had I more than discovered this before the new-comer left the other two and sauntered up to me. "Oh, ah," he said carelessly, "and who do you say that you——" and there he stopped staring in my face. And then, "By heavens, it is!" he cried.

By this time I was something astonished, and more amazed; and answered with spirit—though he was a hard-bitten man, with the look of a soldier or gamester to whom ordinarily I should have given the wall—that I was merely a messenger, and knew nothing of the matter on which I was there, nor for whom they took me.

His face, which for a second or more had blazed

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with excitement, fell suddenly, and when I had done speaking, he laughed.

"Don't you?" he said.

"No," said I. "Not a groat!"

"So it seems," he said again, as if that settled the matter. "Well, then, what is your name?"

"Charles Taylor," I answered.

"And you come from that old rogue Ferg—R. F., I mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, then you can go back to him," he said, dismissing me with a nod. "Or wait. Did you know that gentleman, my friend?"

"Which?" said I.

"The tall one."

"Not from Adam," I said.

"Good! Then there is no need you should know him," he answered coolly. "So, go. And do you tell that old fox to lie close. He was never in anything yet but he spoiled it. Tell him to lie close, and keep his bragging tongue quiet if he can. And now be off. I will explain to the gentlemen."

I needed no second bidding, but before the words were well out of his mouth, had crossed the square to the market side, where there were no lights; thence skirting the garden of Bedford House, I made my way into the Strand, and home by a pretty direct route. The farther I left the men behind me, however, the higher rose my curiosity; so that by the time I reached Bride Lane, and had climbed the stairs to my garret, I was agape to know more, and for once in my life was glad to find the old plotter in my room. Nor was it without satisfaction that to his eager question, "You gave the note to the gentleman?" I answered shortly that I had given it to three.

"To three?" he exclaimed, starting up in a sudden fury. "You d——d cur, if you have betrayed me! What do you mean?"

"Only that I did what you told me," I answered sullenly, at which he sat down again. "I gave it to the gentleman, but he had two with him——"

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"The more to hang him," he sneered, quickly recovering himself. "And what did he say?"

"Very little. Nothing that I remember. But the two with him——"

"Ay?"

"One of them said, 'Tell the old fox'—or the rogue, for he called you both—'to lie close!' And he added," I continued, spite giving me courage, "that you had hitherto spoiled everything you had been in, Mr. Ferguson."

At this I do not think that I ever saw a man in such a rage. Fortunately he did not turn it on me, but for two or three minutes he cursed and swore, bit things, and foamed at the mouth, trampled on his wig, and raged up and down, like nothing so much as a madman, while the imprecations he uttered against his enemies were so horrible I feared to stay with him. At length it seemed to occur to him that the man who could send such a message to him, Ferguson, the great Ferguson, the Ferguson with a thousand guineas on his head, must be a very great man indeed: which, while it consoled him in some measure, excited his curiosity in another and inordinate degree. He hastened to put to me a number of questions, as, what were the two like? And did the one pay the other respect? And how were they dressed? And had either a ribbon or a star? And though in answer I could tell him no more than that the youngest was extremely tall and slight, under thirty, and of an easy carriage and bearing, and in appearance the leader, it was enough for him; he presently cried out that he had it, and slapped his thigh. "Gad! It is Jamie Churchill!" he cried. "It's Berwick, stop my vitals! He had a villainous French accent, had he not?"

"Something of the kind," I answered. Adding, with as much of a sneer as I dared, "If it was not a Scotch one, sir."

He took the gibe and scowled at me—he spoke always like a Sawney, and could never pass for English; but in his pleasure at the discovery he had

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made he let the word pass. "See, man!" he said, "there are fine times coming! It is like Monmouth's day over again. I'll warrant Hunt's, down in the Marshes, is like a penny ferry with their coming over. The fat is fairly in the fire now, and if we do not singe little Hooknose's wig for him, I'll hang for it! He is a better man than his father, is Jamie; ay, the very same figure of a man that his cold-blooded, grease-your-boots, and sell-you-for-a-groat uncle, John Churchill, was at his age! So Jamie is over! Well, well: and if we knew precisely where he was and where he lies nights—there are two ways about it! Ye-es! Ye-es!" And the old rogue, falling first into a drawl and then into silence, looked at me slyly, and, unless I was mistaken, began to ruminate on a new treason; rubbing now one calf and now the other, and now dressed his ragged wig with his fingers, as he continued to smile at his wicked thoughts; so that, as he sat there, one leg over the other knee, he was the veriest bald-headed Judas to be conceived. In the meantime I watched him and hated him, and, I thought, read him.

Whatever the scheme in his mind, however, and whether he was, as I expected, as ready to sell the Duke of Berwick as to plot with him, he said no more to me on the subject; but presently went to his own room. Thus left, I thought it high time to consider where I stood, being all of a tremble and twitter with what I had heard and seen; and I tossed through the night, fearfully sounding the depths in which I found myself, and striving to gain strength to battle with the stream that day by day was forcing me farther and farther from the land. I was no boy or fool, unaware of the danger of being mixed up with great men and great names; rather the ten years during which I had followed public affairs had presented me with only too many examples of the iron pot and the clay pitcher. When, therefore, I slept at last, late in the evening, it was to dream of the sledge and Tyburn Road and the Ordinary—who bore in my dream a marvellous likeness to Mr. Brome—and a

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wall of faces that lined the way and never ceased from St. Giles's Pound to the Edgware Road.

Such a dream, taken with my night's thoughts, left me eager to put in execution a plan I had more than once considered; which was to give up all, to fly from London, and hiding myself in some quiet place under another name, to live as I best might until Ferguson's capture, or a change in the state of affairs freed me from danger. At a distance from him I might even gain courage to inform against him; but this I left for future decision, the main thing now being to pack my clothes, secure about me the money I had saved, which amounted to thirty guineas, and escape from the town on foot or in a stage-wagon without any of his myrmidons being the wiser.

To adopt this course was to lose Mr. Brome's friendship and the livelihood which his employment provided; but such was the fear I had conceived of Ferguson's schemes and the perils they involved that I scarcely hesitated. Before noon, an hour which I thought least open to suspicion, I had engaged a porter and bidden him wait below, had made all my other arrangements, and in five minutes I should have been safe in the streets with my face set towards Kensington—when, at the last moment, there came a tap at my door and a voice asked if I was in.

It was not an hour at which Ferguson had ever troubled me, and trusting to this I had not been careful to hide the signs of removal which my room presented. For a moment I hung over my trunk, panic-stricken; then the door opened, and admitted the girl who had intervened once before—I mean at the door of the Secretary's office—and whom I had since noticed, but not often, going in at the opposite rooms.

She curtsied demurely, standing in the doorway, and said that Mr. Smith—which was one of the names by which Ferguson went—had sent her to me with a message.

"Yes?" I said, forcing myself to speak.

"Would you please to wait on him this evening at

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eight?" she answered. "He wishes to speak with you."

"Yes," I said again, helplessly assenting; and there was an end of my fine evasion. I took it for a warning, and my clothes from my mail; and going down paid the porter a groat, and received in return a dozen porter's oaths. And so dismissed him and my plan together.

CHAPTER XV

It must be confessed that after that it was with a sore shrinking and foreboding of punishment I prepared to obey Mr. Ferguson's summons, and at the hour he had fixed knocked at his door. Hitherto he had always come to me; and even so and on my own ground I had suffered enough at his hands. What I had to expect, therefore, when entirely in his power I failed to guess, but on that account felt only the greater apprehension; so that it was with relief I recognised, firstly, as soon as I crossed the threshold, a peculiar neatness and cleanliness in the room, as if Ferguson at home were something different from Ferguson abroad; and secondly, that he was not alone, but entertained a visitor.

Neither of these things, to be sure, altered his bearing towards me, or took from the brutality with which it was his humour to address me; but as his opening words announced that the visitor's business lay with me, they relieved me from my worst apprehension—namely, that I was to be called to account for the steps I had taken to escape; at the same time that they amused me with the hope of better treatment, since no man could deal with me worse than he had.

"This is your man!" the plotter cried, lying back in his chair and pointing to me with the pipe he was smoking. "Never was such a brave conspirator! Name a rope and he will sweat! For my part, I wish you joy of him. Here, you, sirrah," he continued,

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addressing me, "this gentleman wishes to speak to you, and, mind you, you will do what he tells you, or——"

But at that the gentleman cut him short with a deprecating gesture. "Softly, Mr. Ferguson, softly!" he said, and rose and bowed to me. Then I saw that he was the last comer of the three I had met in Covent Garden, and the one who had dismissed me. "You go too fast," he went on, smiling, "and give our friend here a wrong impression of me. Mr. Taylor, I——"

But it was Ferguson's turn to take him up, which he did with a boisterous laugh. "Ho! Taylor! Taylor!" he cried in derision. "No more Taylor than I am haberdasher! The man's name——"

"Is whatever he pleases," the stranger struck in, with another bow. "I neither ask it, nor seek to know it. Such things between gentlemen and in these times are neither here nor there. It is enough and perhaps too much that I am come to ask you to do me a favour and a service, Mr. Taylor, both of which are in your power."

He spoke with a politeness which went far to win me, and the farther for the contrast it afforded to Ferguson's violence. With his appearance I was not so greatly taken; finding in it, though he was dressed well enough, clearer signs of recklessness than of discretion, and plainer evidences of hard living than of charity or study. But perhaps the prayer of such a man, when he stoops to pray, is the more powerful. At any rate I was already half gained, when I answered, asking him timidly what I could do for him.

"Pay a call with me," he said lightly. "Neither more than that, nor less."

I asked him on whom we were to call.

"On a lady," he answered, "who lives at the other end of the town."

"But can I be of any service?" I said, feebly struggling against the inevitable.

"You can," he answered. "Of great service."

"Devil a bit!" said Ferguson testily, and stared

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derision at me out of a cloud of smoke. It occurred to me then that he was not quite sober, and further that he was no more in the secret of the service than I was. "Devil a bit!" said he again, and more offensively.

"You will let me judge of that," said the gentleman, and he turned to the table. "Will you mind changing the clothes you wear for these?" he said to me with a pleasant air. On which I saw that he had on the table by his hand a suit of fine silk and velvet clothes, surmounted by a grand dress peruke, with a laced steinkirk and ruffles to match. "Pardon the impertinence," he continued, shrugging his shoulders as if the matter were a very slight one, while I stared in amazement at this new turn. "It is only that I think you will aid me the better in these. And, after all, what is a change of clothes?"

Naturally I looked at the things in wonder. I had never worn clothes of the kind. "Do you want me to put them on?" I said.

"Yes," he answered, smiling. "Will you do it on the faith that it will serve me, and trust to me to explain later?"

"If there is no danger in—in the business," I said reluctantly, "I suppose I must." As a fact, whatever he asked me, with Ferguson beside him, I should have to do, so great was my fear of that man.

"There is no danger," he replied. "I will answer for it. I shall accompany you and return with you."

On that, and though I did not comprehend in the least degree what was required of me, I consented, and took the clothes at the stranger's bidding into the next room, where I put off mine and put these on; and presently, seeing myself in a little square of glass that hung against the wall, scarcely knew myself in a grand suit of blue velvet slashed and laced with pearl-colour, a dress peruke, and lace ruffles and cravat. Being unable to tie the cravat, I went back into the room with it in my hand, where I found not only the two I had left, but the girl who had summoned me that morning. The two men greeted the

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change in me with oaths of surprise; the girl, who stood in the background, with an open-eyed stare; but for a moment, and until the stranger had tied the cravat for me, nothing was said that I understood. Then Mr. Ferguson, getting up and walking round me with a candle, gazing at me from top to toe, the other asked him in a voice of some amusement if he knew now who I was.

"A daw in jay's feathers!" said he, scornfully.

"And you do not know him?"

"Not I—except for the silly fool he is!"

"Then you do not know—well, someone you ought to know!" the stranger answered drily. "You are getting old, Mr. Ferguson."

My master cursed his impudence.

"I am afraid that you do not keep abreast of the rising generation," the other continued, coolly eyeing the rage his words excited. "And for your Shaftesburys, and Monmouths, and Ludlows, and the old gang, they don't count for much now. You must look about you, Mr. Ferguson; you must look about you and open your eyes, and learn new tricks. Or before you know it you will find yourself on the shelf."

It would be difficult to exaggerate the fury into which this threw my master; he raved, stamped, and swore, and finally, having recourse to his old trick, tore off his wig, flung it on the ground, and stamped on it. "There!" he cried, with horrible imprecations, the more horrible for the bald ugliness of the man, "and that is what I will do to you—by and bye, Mr. Smith. On the shelf, am I? And need new tricks? Hark you, sir, I am not so much on the shelf that I cannot spoil your game, whatever it is. And G—d—me, but I will!"

Mr. Smith, listening, cool and dark-faced, shrugged his shoulders; but for all his seeming indifference, kept a wary eye on the plotter. "Tut—tut, Mr. Ferguson, you are angry with me," he said. "And say things you do not mean. Besides, you don't know——"

"Know?" the other shrieked.

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"Just so, know what my game is."

"I know this!" Ferguson retorted, dropping his voice on a sudden to a baleful whisper, "who is here, and where he lies, Mr. Smith. And——"

"So do Tom, Dick, and Harry," the other answered, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously; and then to me, "Mr. Taylor," he continued with politeness, "I think we will be going. Light the door, my dear. That is it. I have a coach below, and—good-night, Mr. Ferguson, good-night to you. I'll tell Sir George I have seen you. And do you think over my advice."

At that my master broke out afresh, cursing the other's impudence, and frantically swearing to be even with him; but I lost what he said, in a sudden consternation that seized me as I crossed the threshold; a kind of shiver, which came over me at the prospect of the night, and the dark coach ride, and the uncertainty of this new adventure. The lights in the room, and Mr. Smith's politeness, had given me a courage which the dark staircase dissipated; and but for the hold which my new employer, perhaps unconsciously, laid on my arm, I think I should have stood back and refused to go. Under his gentle compulsion, however, I went down and took my seat in the coach that awaited us; and my companion following me and closing the door, someone unseen raised the steps, and in a moment we were jolting out of Bride Lane, and turned in the direction of the Strand.

More than this I could not distinguish with all my curiosity, and look out as I might; for Mr. Smith, muttering something I did not catch, drew the curtain over the window on my side, and, for the other, interposed himself so continually and skilfully between it and my eyes, that the coach turning two or three corners, in a few minutes I was quite ignorant where we were, or whether we still held a westward direction. A hundred notions of footpads, abductions, Mr. Thynne, and the like passed through my mind while the coach rumbled on, and rumbled on, and rumbled on endlessly; nor was the fact that we

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appeared to avoid the business parts of the town, and chose unlighted ways, calculated to steady my nerves. At length, and while I still debated whether I wished this suspense at an end, or feared more was to follow, the coach stopped with a jerk, which almost threw me out of my seat.

"We are there," said my companion, who had been some time silent. "I must trouble you to descend, Mr. Taylor. And have no fears. The matter in hand is very simple. Only be good enough to follow me closely, and quickly."

And without releasing my arm he hurried me out of the coach, and through a door in a wall. This admitted us only to a garden; and that so dark, and so completely obscured by high walls and the branches of trees, which showed faintly overhead, feathering against the sky, that but for the guidance of his hand I must have stood, unable to proceed. Such an overture was far from abating my fears; nor had I expected this sudden plunge into a solitude, which seemed the more chilling, as we stood in London, and had a little while before passed from the hum of the Strand. I tried to consider where we could be, and the possibilities of retreat; but my conductor left me little room for indecision. Still holding my arm, he led me down a walk, and to a door, which opened as we approached. A flood of light poured out and fell on the pale green of the surrounding trees; the next moment I stood in a small, bare lobby or ante-room, and heard the door chained behind me.

My eyes dazzled by a lamp, I saw no more at first than that the person who held it, and had admitted us, was a woman. But on her setting down the lamp, and proceeding to look me up and down deliberately, the while Mr. Smith stood by, as if he had brought me for this and no other, I took uneasy note of her. She appeared to be verging on forty, but was still handsome after a coarse and full-blown fashion, with lips over-full and cheeks too red; her dark hair still kept its colour, and the remains of a great vivacity still lurked in her gloomy eyes. Her

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dress, of an untidy richness worn and tarnished, and ill-fastened at the neck, was no mean match for her face, and led me to think her—and therein I was right—the waiting-woman of some great lady. Perhaps I should, if let alone, have come something nearer the truth than this, and quite home; but Mr. Smith cut short my observations by falling upon her in a tone of anger. “Hang, it madam, if you are not satisfied,” he cried, “I can only tell you——”

“Who said I was not satisfied?” she answered, still surveying me with the utmost coolness. “But——”

“But what?”

“I cannot help thinking—— What is your name, sir, if you please?” This to me.

“Taylor,” I said.

“Taylor? Taylor?” She repeated the name as if uncertain. “I remember no Taylor; and yet——”

“You remember? You remember? You know very well whom you remember!” Mr. Smith cried, impatiently. “It is the likeness you are thinking of! Why, it is as plain, woman, as the nose on his face. It is so plain that if I had brought him in by the front door——”

“And kept his mouth shut!” she interposed.

“No one would have been the wiser.”

“Well,” she said, grudgingly, and eyeing me with her head aside, “it is near enough.”

“It is the thing!” he cried, with an oath.

“As a Chelsea orange is a China orange!” she answered, contemptuously.

At that he looked at her in a sort of dark fury, precisely, so it seemed to me, as Ferguson had looked at him an hour before. “By heaven, you vixen,” he cried in the end, surprise and rage contending in his tone, “I believe you love him still!”

Her back being towards me I did not see her face, but the venom in her tone when she answered made my blood creep. “Well,” she said, slowly, “and if I do? Much good may it do him!”

Ambiguous as were the words—but not the tone—

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the man shrugged his shoulders. "Then what are we waiting for?" he asked, irritably.

"Madam's pleasure," she answered. And I could see that she loved to baulk him. However, her pleasure was, this time, short-lived, for at that moment a little bell tinkled in a distant room, and she took up the lamp. "Come," she said. "And do you, sir," she continued, turning to me and speaking sharply, "hold up your head and look as if you could cut your own food. You are going to see an old woman. Do you think that she will eat you?"

I let the gibe pass, and wondering of whom and what it was she reminded me whenever she spoke, I followed her up a short dark flight of stairs to a second ante-room, or closet, situate, as far as I could judge, over the other. It was hung with dull, faded tapestry, and smelled close, as if seldom used, and more seldom aired. Setting down the lamp on a little side-table whereon a crumpled domino, a couple of masks, and an empty perfume bottle already lay, she bade us in a low voice wait for her and be silent; and enforcing the last order by placing her finger on her lip, she glided quietly out through a door so skilfully masked by the tapestry as to seem one of the walls.

Left alone with Mr. Smith, who seated himself on the table, I had leisure to take note of the closet. Remarking that the wall at one end was partly hidden by a couple of curtains, between which a bare bracket stood out from the wall, I concluded that the place had been a secret oratory and had witnessed many a clandestine Mass. I might have carried my observations farther; but they were cut short at this point by the return of the woman, who nodding, in silence, held the door open for us to pass.

CHAPTER XVI

THE first to enter, and prepared for many things—among which the gloomy surroundings of an ascetic, devoted to the dark usages of the old faith, held the

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first place in probability—I halted in surprise on the threshold of a lofty and splendid room suffused with rose-tinted light, and furnished with a luxury to which I had been hitherto a stranger. The walls, hung with gorgeous French tapestry, presented a succession of palaces and hunting scenes, interspersed with birds of strange and tropical plumage; between which and the eyes were scattered a profusion of Japanese screens, cabinets, and tables, with some of those quaint Dutch idols, brought from the East, which, new to me, were beginning at this time to take the public taste. Embracing the upper half of the room, and also a *ruelle*, in which stood a stately bed with pillars of silver, a circle of stronger light, dispersed by lamps cunningly hidden in the ceiling, fell on a suite of furniture of rose brocade and silver; in the great chair of which, with her feet on a foot-stool set upon the open hearth, sat an elderly lady, leaning on an ebony stick. A monkey mowed and gibbered on the back of her chair; and a parrot, vieing in brilliance with the broidered birds on the wall, hung by its claws from a ring above her head.

Nor was the lady herself unworthy of the splendour of her surroundings. It is true, her face and piled-up hair, painted and dyed into an extravagant caricature of youth, aped the graces of sixteen, and at the first glance touched the note of the grotesque rather than the beautiful; but it needed only a second look to convince me that with all that she on whom I looked was a great lady of the world, so still she sat, and so proud and dark was the gaze she bent on me over her clasped hands.

At first, it seemed to me, she gazed like one who, feeling a great surprise, has learned to hide that and all other emotions. But presently, "Come in, booby," she cried, in a voice petulant and cracking with age. "Does a woman frighten you? Come nearer, I say. Ay, I have seen your double. But the lamp has gone out."

The woman who had admitted me rustled forward.

"It has sunk a little, perhaps, madam," she said, in a smooth voice. "But I——"

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"But you are a fool," the lady cried. "I meant the lamp in the man, silly. Do you think that any one who has ever seen him would take that block of wood for my son? Give him a brain, and light a fire in him, and spark up those oyster eyes, and—turn him round, turn him round, woman!"

"Turn," Smith muttered, in a fierce whisper.

"Ay," the lady cried, as I went to obey, "see his back, and he is like enough!"

"And perhaps, madam, strangers——"

"Strangers? They'd be strange, indeed, man, to be taken in by him! But walk him, walk him. Do you hear, fellow," she continued, nodding peevishly at me, "hold up your head, and cross the room like a man, if you are one. Do you think the small-pox is in the air that you fear it! Ha! That is better. And what is your name, I wonder, that you have that nose and mouth, and that turn of the chin?"

"Charles Taylor," I made bold to answer, though her eyes went through me, and killed the courage in me.

"Ay, Charles, that is like enough," she replied. "And Taylor, that was your mother's. It is a waiting-woman's name. But who was your father, my man?"

"Charles Taylor, too," I stammered, falling deeper and deeper into the lie.

"Odds my eyes, no!" she retorted with an ugly grin, and shook her piled-up head at me, "and you know it! Come nearer!" And then when I obeyed, "Take that for your lie!" she cried; and, leaning forward with an activity I did not suspect, she aimed a blow at me with her ebony cane, and, catching me smartly across the shins, made me jump again. "That is for lying, my man," she continued with satisfaction, as I stooped ruefully to rub myself. "Before now I have had a man stopped and killed in the street for less. Ay, that have I! and a prettier man than you, and a gentleman! And now walk! walk!" she repeated, tapping the floor imperiously, "and fancy that you have money in your purse."

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I obeyed. But naturally the smart of the cane did not tend to set me at my ease, or abate my awe of the old witch; and left to myself I should have made a poor show. Both the man and the woman, however, prompted and drilled me with stealthy eagerness, and whispering me continually to do this and that, to hold up my chin, to lay back my shoulders, to shake out my handkerchief, to point my toes, I suppose I came off better in this strange exhibition than might have been expected. For by and bye, the lady, who never ceased to watch me with sharp eyes, grunted and bade me stand. "He might pass," she said, "among fools, and with his mouth shut! But odds my life!" she continued, irritably, "God have mercy on us that there should be need of all this! Is there no loyalty left in the world, that my son, of all people, should turn traitor to his lawful King, and spit on his father's faith? Sometimes I could curse him. And you, woman," she cried with sudden fierceness, "you cajoled him once. Can you do nothing now, you Jezebel?"

But the woman she addressed stood stiffly upright, looking before her, and answered nothing; and the mistress, with a smothered curse, turned to the man. "Well," she said, "have you nothing to say?"

"Only, madam, what I said before," he answered smoothly and gravely; "my lord's secession is no longer in issue. The question is how he may be brought back into the path of loyalty. To be frank, he is not of the stuff of those, whom your ladyship knows, who will readily lick both sides of the trencher. And so, without some little pressure, he will not be brought back. But were he once committed to the good cause, either by an indiscretion on his own part, if he could be induced to that——"

"Which he cannot, man, he cannot," she struck in impatiently. "He made one slip, and he will make no second."

"True, madam," the man answered. "Then there remains only the way which does not depend on him, and which I before indicated; some ruse which may

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lead both the friends and enemies of the good cause to think him committed to it. Afterwards, this opinion being brought to his notice, and with it the impossibility of clearing himself to the satisfaction both of St. Germain's and St. James's, he would, I think, come over.

" 'Tis a long way round," said madam, drily.

" It is a long way to Rome, madam," said the man, with meaning in his voice.

She nodded, and shifted uneasily in her seat. " You think that the one means the other? " she said at last.

" I do, madam. But there is a new point, which has just arisen."

" A new point! What? "

" There is a design, and it presses," the man answered in a low voice, and as if he chose his words with care. " It will be executed within the month. If it succeed, and my lord be still where he is, and unreconciled, I know no head will fall so certainly. Not Lord Middleton's influence, no, nor yours, my lady, will save him."

" What, and my Lord Marlborough escape? "

" Yes, madam, for he has made his peace, and proved his sincerity."

" I believe it," she said, grimly. " He is the devil. And his wife is like unto him. But there's Sidney Godolphin—what of him? "

" He has made his peace, madam."

" Russell? "

" The same, madam, and given proofs."

" But, odds my soul, sir," she cried, sharply and pettishly, " if everybody is of one mind, where does it stick that the King does not come over? "

" On a life, madam," Smith answered, letting each word fall slowly, as if it were a jewel. " One life intervenes."

" Ha! " she said, sitting up and looking straight before her. " Sits the wind in that quarter? Well, I thought so."

" And therefore time presses."

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"Still, man," she said, "our family has done much for the throne; and His Gracious Majesty has——"

"Has many virtues, my lady, but he is not forgiving," quoth the tempter, coolly.

On that she sighed, and deeply; and I hearing the sigh, and seeing how uneasily she moved in her chair, comprehended that in old age the passions, however strong they may have been in youth, become slaves to help others to their aims; ay, and I comprehended also that, sharply as she had just rated both the man and the woman, and great lady as she was, and arrogant as had been her life—whereof evidence more than enough was to be found in every glance of her eye and tone of her voice—she was now being pushed and pushed and pushed, into that to which she was but half inclined. But half inclined, I repeat; and yet the battle was over, and she persuaded. I think, but I am not quite sure, that some assenting word had actually fallen from her—or she was in the act of speaking one—when a gentle knock at the door cut short our conference. Mr. Smith raised his hand in warning, and the woman, gliding to the door, opened it, and after speaking a word to someone without, returned.

"My lord is below," said she.

It was strange to see how madam's face changed at that; and how, on the instant, eagerness took the place of fatigue, and hope of *ennui*. There was no question now of withstanding her; or of any other giving orders. The parrot must be removed, because he did not like it; and we fared no better. "Let him up," she cried, peremptorily, striking her stick on the floor; "let him up. And do you, Monterey," she continued to the woman, "be gone, and quickly. It irks him to see you. And, Smith, to-morrow! Do you hear me? Come to-morrow, and I will talk. And take away that oaf! Ugh, out with him! My lord must not be kept waiting for such *canaille*. To-morrow! to-morrow!"

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CHAPTER XVII

TRUTH to tell, I desired nothing so much as to be gone and be out of this imbroglio; and the woman, whom madam had called Monterey, twitching my sleeve and whispering me, I followed her, and slipped out as quickly as I could through the door by which we had entered. Even so we were not a moment too soon, if I was to retreat unseen. For as the curtain dropped behind me I heard a man's voice in the room I had left, and the woman with me chancing to have the lamp, which she had lifted from the table, in her hand at the instant—so that the light fell brightly on her face—I was witness of an extraordinary change which passed over her features. She grew rigid with rage—rage, I took it to be—and stood listening with distended eyes, in perfect forgetfulness of my presence; until, seeming at last to remember me, she glanced from me to the curtain and from the curtain to me in a kind of frantic uncertainty; being manifestly torn in two between the desire to hear what passed and the desire to see me out that I might not hear.

But as to effect the latter she must sacrifice the former, it did not require a sage to predict which impulse—curiosity incited by hatred or mere prudence—would prevail with a woman. And as the sage would have predicted so it happened; after making an abortive movement as if she would place the lamp in my hands, she stealthily laid it on the table beside her, and, making me a sign to wait and be silent, bent eagerly to listen.

I fancy that it was the mention of her own name turned the scale; for that was the first word that caught my ear, and who that was a woman would not listen, being mentioned? The speaker was her mistress, and the words "What, Monterey?" uttered in a voice a little sharp and raised, were as clearly heard as if we had been in the room.

"Yes, madam," came the answer.

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"Well," my lady replied with a chuckle, "I do not think that you are the person who ought to——"

"Object? Perhaps not, my lady mother," came the answer. The speaker's tone was one of grave yet kindly remonstrance; the voice quite strange to me. "But that is precisely why I do," he continued. "I cannot think it wise or fitting that you should keep her about you."

"You kept her long enough about *you*!" madam answered, in a tone between vexation and raillery.

"I own it; and I am not proud of it," the newcomer rejoined. Whereat, though I was careful not to look at the woman listening beside me, I saw the veins in one of her hands which was under my eyes swell with the rage in her, and the nail of the thumb grow white with the pressure she was placing on the table to keep herself still. "I am very far from proud of it," the speaker continued, "and for the matter of that——"

"You were always a bit of a Puritan, Charles," my lady cried.

"It may be."

"I am sure I do not know where you get it from," madam continued irritably, stirring in her chair—I heard it crack, and her voice told the rest. "Not from me, I'll swear!"

"I never accused you, madam."

That answer seemed to please her, for on the instant she went off into such a fit of laughter as fairly choked her. When she had a little recovered from the paroxysm of coughing that followed this, "You can be more amusing than you think, Charles," she said. "If your father had had a spark of your humour——"

"I thought that it was agreed between us that we should not talk of him," the man said gravely, and with a slight suspicion of sternness in his voice.

"Oh, if you are on your high horse!" madam answered, "the devil take you! But, there, I am sure that I do not want to talk of him, poor man. He was dull enough. Let us talk of something livelier—let us talk of Monterey instead; what is amiss with her?"

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"I do not think that she is a fit person to be about you."

"Why not? She is married now," my lady retorted. "D'ye know that?"

"Yes, I heard some time ago that she was married; to Mr. Bridges' steward at Kingston."

"Matthew Smith?"

"Yes."

"And who recommended *him* to my husband, I should like to know?" madam answered in a tone of malice. "Why, you, my friend."

"It is possible. I remember something of the kind."

"And who recommended him to you? Why, she did: in the days when you did not warn people against her." And madam chuckled wickedly.

"It is possible," he answered, "but the matter is twelve years old, and more; and I do not want to—"

"Go back to it," madam cried sharply. "I can quite understand that. Nor to have Monterey about to remind you of it—and of your wild oats."

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps, Mr. Square-Toes? You know it is the case!" was the vivid answer. "For otherwise, as I like the woman, and now, at all events, she is married—what is against her?"

"I do not trust her," was the measured answer.

"And, madam, in these days people are more strait-laced than they were; it is not fitting."

"That for people!" my lady cried with a reckless good humour that would have been striking in one half her age. "People! Odds my life, when did I care for people? But come, I will make a bargain with you. Tit for tat. A Roland for your Oliver! If you will give me your Anne I will give you my Monterey."

"My Anne?" he exclaimed, in a tone of complete bewilderment.

"Yes, your Anne! Come, my Monterey for your Anne!"

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There was silence for a moment, and then "I do not at all understand you," he said.

"Don't you? I think you do," she answered lightly. Look you,

"When William king is William king no more.

Now, you understand?"

"I understand, my lady, that you are saying things which are not fitting for me to hear," the man answered, in a tone of cold displeasure. "The King, thank God, is well. When he ails it will be time to talk of his succession."

"It will be a little late then," she retorted. "In the meantime, and to please me——"

He raised his hand in protest. "Anything else," he said.

"You have not yet heard what I propose," she cried, her voice shrill with anger. "It is a trifle, and to please me you might well do it. Set your hand to a note which I will see delivered in the proper quarter, promising nothing in the Prince's lifetime—there! but only that in the event of his death you will support a restoration."

"I cannot do it," he answered.

"Cannot do it?" she rejoined with heat. "Why not? You have done as much before."

"It may be: and been forgiven for it by the best Master man ever had!"

"Who feels nothing, forgives easily," she sneered.

"But not twice," he said gravely. "The King——"

"Which King?"

"The only King I acknowledge," he answered unmoved. "Who knows, believe me, so much more than you give him credit for, that it were well if your friends bethought them of that before it be too late. He has winked at much and forgiven more—no one knows it better than I—but he is not blinded; and there is a point, madam, beyond which he can be as steadfast to punish as your King. If Sir John Fenwick, therefore, who I know well is in England——"

But at that she cut him short, carried away by a

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passion which she had curbed as long as it was in her impetuous nature to curb anything. "Odds my life!" she cried, and at the sound of her voice uplifted in a shriek of anger, the woman listening beside me raised her face to mine, and smiled cruelly—"Odds my life, your King and my King! Kings indeed! Why, mannikin, how many Kings do you think there are! By G—d, Master Charles, you will learn one of these days that there is but one King, sent by God, one King and no more, and that his yea and nay are life and death! You fool, you! I tell you, you are trembling on the edge, you are tottering! A day, a week, a month at most, and you fall—unless you clutch at the chance of safety I offer you! Sign the note! Sign the note, man! No one but the King and Middleton shall know of it; and when the day comes, as come it will, it shall avail you."

"Never, madam," was the cold and unmoved answer. So much I heard, and my lady's oath and volley of abuse; but in the midst of this, and while she still raged, my companion, satisfied I suppose with what she had learned, and assured that her lady would not get her way, twitched my sleeve, and, softly taking up the lamp, signed to me to go before her. I obeyed, nothing loth, and, regaining the small ante-room by which I had entered, found the man Smith awaiting us.

When they had whispered together, "I'll see you home, Mr. Taylor," said he, somewhat grimly. "And to-morrow I will call and talk business. What we want you to do is a very simple matter."

"It is simply that my lady's son is a fool!" the woman cried, snappishly.

"Well," he said, smiling, "I should hardly call my Lord Shaftesbury that!"

The woman screamed and clapped her hand to his mouth. "You babbling idiot!" she cried, in a passion. "You have let it out."

He stood gaping. "Good lord!" he said.

"You have let it out with a vengeance now!" she repeated, furiously.

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He looked foolish ; and at last, " He did not hear," he said.

" Hear? He heard, unless he is deaf!" she retorted. " You may lay your account with that. For me, I'll leave you. You have done the mischief and may mend it."

CHAPTER XVIII

BUT as the spoken word has sometimes the permanence which proverbs attach to the *Littera scripta*, and is only confirmed by bungling essays to erase it, so it was in this case ; Mr. Smith's endeavours to explain away the fact which he had carelessly blabbed only serving to impress it the more deeply on my memory. It would seem that he was partly aware of this ; for not only did his attempts lack the dexterity which I should have expected from one whose features augured much experience of the world, but he quickly gave up the attempt as labour in vain, and gruffly bidding me go before to the coach, followed me and took his seat beside me. We rumbled away. The night was overcast, the neighbourhood seemed to be rural ; and, starting from an unknown point, I had less chance than before of tracing the devious lanes and streets through which we drove ; so that when the coach presently stopped in a part of the town more frequented I had not the least idea where we were or where we had been.

" You can get home from here," said he, still ruffled, and scarce able to speak to me civilly.

Then I saw, as I went to descend, that we were near the end of Holborn, in the Tyburn Road, where it grows to country. " I will see you to-morrow," he cried. " And, mind you, in the meantime, the less you say to Ferguson the better, my man!" With which the coach drove away towards Kensington leaving me standing against the wall of St. Giles's Pound.

Thus released, alone, and free to consider what had

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happened to me, I found a difficulty in tracing where I had been, but none in following the drift of the strange scene and stranger conversation at which I had been present. Even the plans of those who had conveyed me to that place were transparent. It needed no Solomon to discern that in the man Smith and the woman Monterey the young lord had two foes in his mother's household, as dangerous as foes could be; the woman moved, as I conjectured, by that *spretæ injuria formæ*, of which the great Roman poet speaks, and the man by I know not what old wrong or jealousy. It was plain that these two, to obtain their ends, were urging on the mother a most perilous policy; that, I mean, of committing the son to the Jacobite Court, that so he might be cut off from St. James's; moreover, that, as he could not be induced, in *propria persona*, to such a treasonable step as would serve their ends, advantage was to be taken of some likeness that I bore to him (which Smith had observed the previous evening in Covent Garden) to personate him in a place or company where his presence would be conclusive both for and against him.

I could believe that the mother contemplated but vaguely the power over him which the incident would give her; and dreamed of using it only in the last resort; rather amusing herself in the present with the thought that short of this, and without bringing the deception to his notice, the effect she desired would be produced—since he would be held at St. Germain's to be well affected, and at St. James's the matter would not be known. So, in his own despite, and without his knowledge, he could be reconciled to the one court, while remaining faithful to the other!

But, as in the mass of conspiracies—and this was especially true of the conspiracies of that age—the acute eye can detect the existence of an inner and outer ring of conspirators, whereof the latter are commonly the dupes of the former, so I took it that here Smith and the woman meditated other and more serious results than those which my lady foresaw; and, thinking less of my lord's safety in the

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event of a restoration than of punishing him or obtaining a hold upon him—and more of private revenge than of the Good Cause—had madam for their principal tool. Such a consideration, while it increased my reluctance to be mixed up with a matter so two-faced, left me to think whether I should not seek out the victim, and by an early information gain his favour and protection.

I stood in the darkness of the street, doubtful, and weighing the matter. Clearly, if I had to do the thing, now was the time, before I saw Smith, or exposed myself to an urgency which in spite of his politeness might, I fancied, be of a kind difficult to resist. If by going straight to Lord Shaftesbury I could kill two birds with one stone—could at once free myself from the gang of plotters under whom I suffered and secure for the future a valuable patron—here was a chance in a hundred, and I should be foolish to hesitate.

Nor did I do so long. True, it struck me a little that I knew nothing of my Lord Shaftesbury's whereabouts in London; nor whether he lived in town or in the great house among the lanes and gardens which I had visited, but of the road whereto I had no more knowledge than a blind man. This, however, I could learn at the nearest coffee-house: and impulse rather than calculation directing my steps, I hurried hot-foot towards Covent Garden, which lay conveniently to my hand.

It was not until I was in the square and close to the Piazza that I bethought me how imprudent I was to revisit the scene of last night's adventure—a place where it was common knowledge that the Jacobites held their assignations, and where I might be recognised. To reinforce this late-found discretion, and blow up the spark of alarm already kindled, I had not stood hesitating while a man could count ten before my eye fell on the very same soldierly gentleman, with the handkerchief hanging out of his pocket, to whom I had been sent the evening before. He was alone, walking under the dimly lighted

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Piazza as he had walked then; but as I caught sight of him two others came up and joined him, and, in terror lest these should be the two I had met before, I retreated hastily into the shadow of St. Paul's Church, and so back the way I had come.

However, I was not to get off so easily. Though the hour was late, the market closed, and the pavement in front of the taverns deserted, or fringed only by a chair waiting for a belated gamester, I ran a greater risk of being recognised, as I passed, than I thought, and had not gone ten paces along King Street before I heard a light foot following me, and a hand caught my arm. Turning in a fright I found it was only a girl, and, at first sight, was for wresting myself from her, glad that it was no worse; but she muttered my name, and looking down I recognised to my astonishment the girl I had seen at Ferguson's earlier in the evening.

At that, I remember, a dread of the man and his power seized me and chilled my very heart. This was the third time this girl, whom I never saw at other seasons, had arisen out of the ground to confront me and pluck me back when on the point of betraying him. I stared at her, thinking of this, with I know not what of affright and shrinking, and could scarcely command either voice or limbs.

And yet, as she stood looking at me with the dark length of the street stretching to the market behind her, it must be confessed that there was little in her appearance to cause terror. The night being cold, and a small rain falling, she had a shawl drawn tightly over her head, whence her face, small and pale as a child's, peered at me. I thought to read in it a sly and selfish triumph such as became Ferguson's minion: instead I discerned only a weariness that went ill with her years—and a little flicker of contempt in eye and lip. The weariness was also in her voice when she spoke. "Well met, Mr. Price," she said. "I am in luck to light on you."

I shivered in my shoes; but without seeming to mark me, "I want this note taken to Mr. Wilkins,"

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she continued, rapidly pressing a scrap of paper into my hand. "He is in the tavern there, the 'Seven Stars.' Ask for the Apollo Room, and you will find him."

"But, one minute," I protested, as in her eagerness she pushed me that way with her hand, "did Mr. Ferguson—is it from him?"

"Of course, fool," she answered, sharply. "Do you think that I have been standing here for the last half-hour in cold and wet for my own pleasure?"

"But if he sent it?" I remonstrated, feebly, "perhaps he may not like me to interfere—to——"

"Like me to?" she retorted, sharply, mocking my tone. "Who said he would? Cannot you understand that it is I who do not like to? That I am not going into that place at this time of night, and half in the house drunken brutes? It is bad enough to be here, loitering up and down as if I were what I am not—and free to be spoken to by every impudent blood that passes! Go, man, and do it, and I will wait so long. What do you fear?"

"The rope," said I, "to be plain with you." And I looked with abhorrence at the scrap of paper she had given me. "I have taken too many of these," I said.

"Well, you will take one more!" she answered, doggedly. "Or you are no man. See, there is the door. Ask for the Apollo Room, give it to him, and the thing is done!" And with that she set both hands to me and pushed me the way she would have me move—I mean towards the tavern. "Go!" she said. "Go!"

Hate the thing as I might, and did, I could not resist persuasions addressed to me in such a tone; nor fail to be moved by the girl's shrinking from the task, which had to be done, it seemed, by one of us. After all, it was no more than I had done several times before; and my reluctance having its origin in the resolution, to which I had just come, to break off from the gang, yielded to the reflection that the design lay as yet in my own breast, and might be carried out as well to-morrow as to-day. In a word,

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I complied out of pity, went to the tavern, and walked boldly in.

I had been in the house before, and knew where I should find a waiter of whom I might inquire privately; I passed by the public room, therefore, and was for going to the place I mean. I had scarcely advanced three paces beyond the threshold, however, before a great noise of voices and laughter and beating of feet met my ears and surprised me; the hubbub was so loud and boisterous as to be unusual even in places of that kind. I had no more than taken this in, and set it down to an orgy beyond the ordinary, when I came on a pale-faced group standing at gaze at the foot of the stairs, the landlord, two or three drawers, and as many women being among them. It was easy to see that they were in a fever about the noise above; for while the host was openly wringing his hands and crying that those devils would ruin him, a woman who seemed to be his wife was urging first one and then another of the drawers to ascend and caution the party. That something more than disorderliness, or a visit from the constable was in question I gathered from the host's pale face; and this was confirmed when on seeing me they dispersed a little, and affected to be unconcerned. Until I asked for the Apollo Room, whereon they all came together again and fell on me with complaints and entreaties.

"'Fore God, sir, I think your friends are mad!" the host cried, in a perfect fury. "Go up! Go up, and tell them that if they want to be hanged, and to hang me as well, they are going the right way about it."

"It is well it is night," said the head waiter grimly, "or the market porters would have broken our windows before now."

"And got us all in the Compter!" the woman wailed. And then to me, "Go up, sir, go up and tell them that if they would not have the mob pull the house down——"

But the tumult above, waxing loud at that moment,

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drowned her words, and certainly took from me what little goodwill to ascend I had. However, the host, having me there, a person who had inquired for the room, would take no denial; but, delighted to have found a deputy, he fairly set me on the stairs and pushed me up. "Go up and tell them! Go up and tell them!" he kept repeating. "You asked for the room and there it is."

In a word I had no choice, and with reluctance went up. The noise was such I could not fail to find the door and the room; I knocked and opened, a roar of voices poured out, and even before I entered the room I knew what was afoot, and could swear to treason. Such cries as "Down with the Whigs and damn their King!" "The 29th of May and a glorious Restoration!" "Here's to the Hunting Party!" poured out in a confused medley; with half a dozen others equally treasonable, and equally certain, were they overheard in the street, to bring down the mob and the messengers on the speakers.

True, as soon as the half muddled brains of the company took in the fact that the door was open, and a stranger standing on the threshold—which they were not quick to discern owing to the cloud of tobacco-smoke that filled the room—nine-tenths quavered off into silence and gaped at me; that proportion of the company having still the sense to recognise the risk they were running, and to apprehend that judgment had taken them in the act. Two men in particular, older than the rest—the one a fat, infirm fellow with a pallid face and the air of a rich citizen, the other a peevish, red-eyed atomy in a green fur-lined coat—were of this party. They had not, I think, been of the happiest before, seated in the midst of that crew; but now, sinking back in their high-backed chairs, they stared at me as if I carried death in my face. A neighbour of theirs, however, went beyond them; for, with a howl that the Secretary was on them and the officers were below, he kicked over his chair and dashed for a window, pausing only when he had thrown it up.

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But with all this the recklessness of some was evident: for while I stood, uncertain to whom to speak, one of the more drunken staggered from his seat, and, giving a shrill view-halloo that might have been heard in Bedford House, made towards me with a cup in his hand.

"Drink!" he cried, with a hiccough, as he forced it upon me. "Drink! To the squeezing of the Rotten Orange! Drink, man, or you are no friend of ours, but a snivelling, sneaking, white-faced son of a Dutchman like your master! So drink, and—— Eh, what is it? What is the matter?"

CHAPTER XIX

It was no small thing could enlighten that brain clouded by the fumes of drink and conceit; but the silence, perfect and clothing panic—a silence that had set in with his first word, and a panic that had grown with a whisper passed round the table—came home to him at last. "What is it? What is the matter?" he cried, with a silly drunken laugh. And he turned to look.

No one answered; but he saw the sight which I had already seen—his fellows fallen from him, and huddled on the farther side of the table, as sheep huddle from the sheep-dog; some pale, cross-eyed, and with lips drawn back, seeking softly in their cloaks for weapons; others standing irresolute, or leaning against the wall, shaking and unnerved.

Cooled, but not sobered by the sight, he turned to me again. "Won't he drink the toast?" he maun-dered, in an uncertain voice. "Why—why not, I'd like to know. Eh? Why not?" he repeated, and staggered.

At that someone in the crowd laughed hysterically; and this breaking the spell, a second found his voice. "'Gad! It is not the man!" the latter cried with a rattling oath. "It is all right! I swear it is! Here

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you—speak, fool ! ” he went on to me. “ What do you here ? ”

“ This for Mr. Wilkins,” I answered, holding out my note.

I meant no jest, but the words supplied the signal for such a roar of laughter as well-nigh lifted the roof. The men were still between drunk and sober ; and in the rebound of their relief staggered and clung to one another, and bent this way and that in a paroxysm of convulsive mirth. Vainly one or two, less heady than their fellows, essayed to stay a tumult that promised to rouse the watchmen ; it was not until after a considerable interval—nor until the more drunken had laughed their fill, and I had asked myself a hundred times if these were men to be trusted with secrets and others’ necks—that the man with the white handkerchief, who had just entered, gained silence and a hearing. This done, however, he rated his fellows with the utmost anger and contempt ; the two elderly gentlemen whom I have mentioned adding their quavering, passionate remonstrances to his. But as in this kind of association there can be little discipline, and those are most forward who have least to lose, the hotheads only looked silly for a moment, and the next were calling for more liquor.

“ Not a bottle ! ” said he of the white handkerchief. “ *Nom de Dieu*, not a bottle ! ”

“ Come, captain, we are not on service now,” quoth one.

“ Aren’t you ? ” said he, looking darkly at them.

“ No, not we ! ” cried the other recklessly, “ and what is more, we will have no ‘ Regiment du Roi ’ regulations here ! Is not a gentleman to have a second bottle if he wants one ? ”

“ It is twelve o’clock,” replied the captain. “ For the love of Heaven, man, wait till this business is over ; and then drink until you burst, if you please ! For me, I am going to bed.”

“ But who is this—lord ! I don’t know what to call him ! ” the fellow retorted, turning to me with a half drunken gesture. “ This gentleman dancing-master ? ”

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"A messenger from the old Fox: Mr.—Taylor, I think he calls himself?" and the officer turned to me.

"Yes," said I.

"Well, you may go. Tell the gentleman who sent you that Wilkins got his note, and will bear the matter in mind."

I said I would; and was going with that, and never more glad than to be out of that company. But the fellow who had asked who I was, and who, being thwarted of his drink was out of temper, called rudely to know where I got my wig, and who rigged me out like a lord; swearing that Ferguson's service must be a d——d deal better than the one he was in, and the pay higher than a poor trooper's.

This gave the cue to the man who had before forced the drink on me; who, still having the cup in his hand, thrust himself in my way, and forcing the liquor on me so violently that he spilled some over my coat, vowed that though all the Scotch colonels in the world barred the way I should drink his toast, or he would skewer me.

"To Saturday's work! A straight eye and a firm hand!" he cried. "Drink, man, drink! For a-hunting we will go, and a-hunting we will go! And if we don't flush the game at Turnham Green, call me a bungler!"

I heard one of the elder men protest, with something between a curse and a groan, that the fool would proclaim it at Charing Cross next; but, thinking only to be gone (and the man being so drunk that it was evident resistance would but render him more obstinate, and imperil my skin), I took the cup and drank, and gave it back to him. By that time two or three of the more prudent—if any in that company could be called prudent—had risen and joined us; who, when he would have given another toast, forced him away, scolding him soundly for a leaky chatterer, and a fool who would ruin all with the drink.

Freed from his importunities, I waited for no second permission, but got me out and down the stairs, at the foot of which the landlord's scared face and the

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waiting, watching eyes of the drawers and servants, who still lingered there, listening, put the last touch to the picture of madness and recklessness I had witnessed above. Here were informers and evidences ready to hand and more than enough, if the beggars in the street, and the orange girls, and night-walkers who prowled the market, were not sufficient to bring home to its authors the treason they bawled and shouted overhead.

The thought that such rogues should endanger my neck, and good, honest men's necks, made my blood run cold and hot at once; hot, when I thought of their folly, cold, when I recalled Mr. Ashton executed in '90 for carrying treasonable letters, or Anderton, betrayed and done to death for printing the like. I could understand Ferguson's methods; they had reason in them, and if I hated them and loathed them, they were not so very dangerous. For he had disguises and many names and lodgings, and lurked from one to another under cover of night; and if he sowed treason, he sowed it stealthily and in darkness, with all the adjuncts which prudence and tradition dictated; he boasted to those only whom he had in his power, and used the like instruments. But the outbreak of noisy, rampant, reckless rebellion which I had witnessed—and which it seemed to me must be known to all London within twenty-four hours—filled me with panic. It so put me beside myself that, when the girl who had employed me on that errand met me in the street, I cursed her and would have passed her, being unable to say another word lest I should weep. But she turned with me, and keeping pace with me asked me continually what it was; and getting no answer, by and bye caught my arm and forced me to stand in the passage beyond Bedford House and close to the Strand. Here she repeated her question so fiercely—asking me besides if I were mad, and the like—and showed herself such a termagant, that I had no option but to answer her.

"Mad?" I cried, passionately. "Ay, I am mad—to have anything to do with such as you."

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"But what is it? What has happened?" she persisted, peering at me, and so barring the way that I could not pass.

"Could you not hear?"

"I could hear that they were drinking," she answered. "I knew that, and therefore I thought that you should go to them."

"And run the risk?"

"Well, you are a man," she answered coolly.

At that I stood so taken aback—for she spoke it with meaning and a sort of sting—that for a minute I did not answer her. Then, "Is not a man's life as much to him as a woman's is to her?" I said with indignation.

"A man's!" she replied. "Ay, but not a mouse's! I will tell you what, Mr. Taylor, or Mr. Price, or whatever your name is——"

"Call me what you like!" I said. "Only let me go!"

"Then I will call you Mr. Craven!" she retorted bitterly. "Or Mr. Daw in Peacock's feathers. And let you go. Go, go, you coward! Go, you craven!"

It was not the most gracious permission, and stung me; but I took it sullenly, and getting away from her went down the passage towards the Strand, leaving her there; not gladly, although to go had been all I had asked a moment before. No man, indeed, could have more firmly resolved to wrench himself from the grasp of the gang whose tool this little spitfire was; nor to a man bred to peaceful pursuits (as I had been) and flung into such an imbroglio as this—wherein to dance on nothing seemed to be the alternative whichever way I looked—was it a matter of so much consequence to be called coward by a child, that I must hesitate for that. Add to this, that the place and time, a dingy passage on a dark night with rain falling and a chill wind blowing, and none abroad but such as honest men would avoid, were not incentives to rashness or adventure.

And yet—and yet when it came to going, *nullis vestigiis retrorsum*, as the Latins say, I proved to be

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either too much or too little of a man, these arguments notwithstanding; too little of a man to weigh reason justly against pride, or too much of a man to hear with philosophy a girl's taunt. When I had gone fifty yards, therefore, I halted; and then in a moment went back. Not slowly, however, but in a gust of irritation, so that for a very little I could have struck the girl for the puling face and helplessness that gave her an advantage over me. I found her in the same place, and asked her roughly what she wanted.

"A man," she said.

"Well," I answered sullenly, "what is it?"

"Have I found one? that is the question," she retorted keenly. And at that again I could have had it in my heart to strike her across her scornful face. "My uncle is at least a man."

"He is a bad one, curse him!" I cried in a fury.

She looked at me coolly. "That is better," she said. "If your deeds were of a piece with your words you would be no man's slave. His least of all, Mr. Price!"

"You talk finely," I said, my passion cooling, as I began to read a covert meaning in her tone and words, and that she would be at something. "It comes well from you, who do his errands day and night!"

"Or find someone to do them," she answered with derision.

"Well, after this you will have to find someone else," I cried, warming again.

"Ah, if you would keep your word!" she cried in a different tone, clapping her hands softly, and peering at me. "If you would keep your word."

Seeing more clearly than ever that she would be at something, and wishing to know what it was, "Try me," I said. "What do you mean?"

"It is plain," she answered, "what I mean. Carry no more messages! Be sneak and spy no longer! Cease to put your head in a noose to serve rogues' ends! Have done, man, with cringing and fawning, and trembling at big words. Break off with these

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villains who hold you, put a hundred miles between you and them, and be yourself! Be a man!"

"Why, do you mean your uncle?" I cried, vastly surprised.

"Why not?" she said.

"But—if you feel that way, why do his bidding yourself?" I answered, doubting all this might be a trap of that cunning devil's. "If I sneak and spy, who spies on me, Miss?"

"I do," she said, leaning against the wall of Bedford Garden, where one of Heming's new lights, set up at the next corner, shone full on her face. "And I am weary of it."

"But if you are weary of it——"

"If I am weary of it, why don't I free myself instead of preaching to you?" she answered. "First, because I am a woman, Mr. Wiseman."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," I retorted.

"Don't you?" she answered bitterly. "Then I will tell you. My uncle feeds me, clothes me, gives me a roof—and sometimes beats me. If I run away as I bid you run away, where shall I find board and lodging, or anything but the beating? A man comes and goes; a woman, if she has not some one to answer for her, must to the Justice and then to the Roundhouse and be set to beating hemp; and her shoulders smarting to boot. Can I get service without a character?"

"No," I said, "that is true."

"Or travel without money?"

"No."

"Or alone—except to Whetstone Park?"

"No."

"Well, it is fine to be a man then," she answered, leaning her little shawled head farther and farther back against the wall, and slowly moving it to and fro, while she looked at me from under her eyelashes, "for he can do all. And take a woman with him."

I started at that, and stared at her, and saw a little colour come into her pale face. But her eyes, far from falling under my gaze, met my eyes with a bold,

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mischievous look that gradually, and as she still moved her head to and fro, melted into a smile.

It was impossible to mistake her meaning, and I felt a thrill run through me, such as I had not known for ten years. "Oh," I said at last, and awkwardly, "I see now."

"You would have seen long ago if you had not been a fool," she answered. And then, as if to excuse herself, she added—but this I did not understand—"Not that fine feathers make fine birds—I am not such a fool myself, as to think that. But——"

"But what?" I said, my face warm.

"I am a fool all the same."

Her eyes falling with that, and her pale face growing to a deeper colour, I had no doubt of the main thing, though I could not follow her precise drift. And I take it there are few men who, upon such an invitation, however veiled, would not respond. Accordingly I took a step towards the girl, and went, though clumsily, to put my arm round her.

But she pushed me off with a vigour that surprised me; and she mocked me with a face between mischief and triumph—a face that was more like a mutinous boy's than a girl's. "Oh, no," she said. "There is a good deal between this and that, Mr. Price."

"How?" I said, shamefacedly.

"Do you go?" she asked sharply. "Is it settled? That first of all, if you please."

As to the going—somewhere—I had made up my mind long ago, before I met her, or went into the "Seven Stars," or knew that a dozen mad toppers were roaring treason about the town, and bidding fair to hang us all. But being of a cautious temper, and seeing conditions which I had not contemplated added to the bargain, and having besides a shrewd idea that I could not afterwards withdraw, I hesitated. "It is dangerous!" I said.

"I will tell you what is dangerous," she answered, wrathfully, showing her little white teeth as she flashed her eyes at me, "and that is to be where we are. Do you know what they are doing there—in

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that house? " And she pointed towards the market, whence we had come.

"No," I said reluctantly, wishing she would say no more.

"Killing the King," she answered in a low voice. "It is for Saturday, or Saturday week. He is to be stopped in his coach as he comes from hunting—in the lane between Turnham Green and the river. You can count their chances. They are merry plotters! And now—now," she continued, "do you know where you stand, Mr. Price, and whether it is dangerous?"

"I know," I said, trembling at that bloody design, which no whit surprised me since everything I had heard corroborated it—"I know what I have to do."

"What?" she said.

"Go straight to the Secretary's office," I said, "and tell him. Tell him!"

"You won't do it," she answered, "or, at least, I won't."

"Why?" I asked, atremble with excitement.

"Why?" she echoed, mocking me; and I noticed that not only were her eyes bright, but her lips red. "Why, firstly, Mr. Price, because I want to have done with plots and live honestly; and that is not to be done on blood-money. And secondly, because it is dangerous—as you call it. Do you want to be an evidence, set up for all to point at, and six months after to be decoyed to Wapping, dropped into a dark hold, and carried over to France?"

"God forbid!" I said, aghast at this view of things.

"Then have done with informing," she answered, with a little spurt of heat. "Or let be, at any rate, until we are safe ourselves and snug in the country. Then if you choose, and you do nothing to hurt my uncle—for I will not have him touched—we may talk of it. But not for money."

Those words "safe and snug," telling of a prospect that at that moment seemed of all others the most desirable in the world, dwelt so lovingly on my ear,

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that in place of hesitation I felt only eagerness and haste.

"I will go!" I said.

"You will?" she said.

"Yes," I answered.

"And——?"

"And what?" I said, wondering.

She hesitated a moment, and then, "That is for you to say," she replied, lowering her eyes.

It is possible that I might not have understood her, even then, if I had not marked her face, and seen that her lips were quivering with a sudden shyness which words and manner in vain belied. She blushed and trembled, and, lowering her eyes, drew forward the shawl that covered her head, the street-urchin gone out of her. And I, seeing and understanding, had other and new thoughts of her which remained with me. "If you mean that," I said, clumsily, "I will make you my wife—if you will let me."

"Well, we'll see about it when we get to Romford," she answered, looking nervously aside and plucking at the fringe of the shawl. "We have to escape first. And now—listen," she continued rapidly, and in her ordinary voice. "My uncle is removing to-morrow to another hiding-place, and I go first with some clothes and baggage. He will not flit himself till it is dark. Do you put your trunk outside your door, and I will take it and send it by the Chelmsford wagon. At noon meet me at Clerkenwell Gate, and we will walk to Romford and hide there until we know how things are going."

"Why Romford?" I said.

"Why anywhere?" she answered impatiently.

That was true enough; and seeing in what mood she was, and that out of sheer contrariness she was inclined to be the more shrewish now because she had melted to me a moment before, I refrained from asking further questions, listening instead to her minute directions, which were given with as much clearness and perspicuity as if she had dwelt on this escape for a twelvemonth past. It was plain, indeed,

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that she had not fetched and carried for the famous Ferguson for nothing; nor watched his methods to little purpose. Nor was this all: mingled with this display of precocious skill there constantly appeared a touch of malice and mischief, more natural in a boy than a girl, and seldom found even in boys where the gutter has not served for a school. And through this again, as through the folds of a shifting gauze, appeared that which gradually, as I listened, took more and more a hold on me—the woman.

Yet I suppose that there never was a stranger love-making in the world; if love-making that could be called wherein one at least of us had in mind ten thoughts of fear and death for one of happiness or love, and a pulse attuned rather to the dreary drip of the wet eaves about us, and the monotonous yelp of a cur chained among the stalls, than to the flutter of desire.

And yet, when, our plan agreed upon and the details settled, we turned homewards and went together through the streets, I could not refrain from glancing at my companion from time to time, in doubt and almost in incredulity. When the dream refused to melt, when I found her still moving at my elbow, her small shawled head on a level with my shoulder—when, I say, I found her so, not love, but a sense of companionship and a feeling of gratulation that I was no longer alone, stole for the first time into my mind and comforted me. I had gone so many years through these streets *solus et cælebs*, that I pricked my ears and pinched myself in sheer astonishment at finding another beside me, and other feet keeping time with mine, nor knew whether to be more confounded or relieved by the thought that of all persons' interests her interests marched with mine.

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CHAPTER XX

THE clocks had gone midnight when I parted from Mary at the door of the house and groped my way upstairs to my room, where, throwing off my clothes I lay down, not to sleep, but to revolve endlessly and futilely the plans we had made and the risks we ran, and the thousand issues that might come of either. Cogitation brought me no nearer to a knowledge of the event, but only heated my brain and increased my impatience, the latter to such a degree that with the first light I was up and moving, and had my trunk packed. Nor did I fail to note the strange and almost incredible turn which now led me to look for support in my flight to the very person whose ominous entrance twenty-four hours earlier had forced me to lay aside the thought.

Long before it could by any chance be necessary I opened the door, and softly carrying out my box, placed it in a dark corner on the landing. After this a great interval elapsed, during which I conjured up a hundred mischances. At length I heard someone afoot opposite; and then the stumbling tread of a porter carrying goods down the stairs. About eleven I ventured to peep out, and learned with satisfaction that the trunk had vanished; it remained therefore for me to do the same. Bestowing a last look on the little attic which had been my home so long, and until lately no unhappy home, I took up my hat and cloak, and making sure for the fiftieth time that I had my small stock of money hidden in my clothes, I opened the door, and, stealing out, stood a minute to listen before I descended.

I heard nothing to alarm me; yet a second later I shrieked in affright, and almost sank down under the sudden grip of a hand on my shoulder. The hand was Ferguson's, who, listening at my chamber door, had heard me move towards it, and flattened himself against the wall beside it, and so, being in the dark corner farthest from the staircase, had eluded my

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notice. He chuckled vastly at his cunning and the fright he had given me, and rocking me to and fro, asked me grimly what I had done with my fine clothes and my wig.

"Ay, and that is not all," he continued. "I shall want to know a little more about that matter, my friend. And mind you, Mr. Price, the truth! The truth, or I will wring this tender ear of yours from your head. For the present, however, that matter may wait. I shall have it when I want it. Now I have other work for you. Come into my room."

"I am going to the tavern," I said desperately; and I hung back. "Afterwards, Mr. Ferguson, I will——"

"Oh, to the tavern," he answered, mimicking me. "And for what?"

"My dinner," I faltered.

He burst into a volley of oaths, and seizing me again by the shoulder ran me into this room. "Your dinner, indeed, you dirty, low-born pedlar!" he cried in a fury. "Who are you to dine at taverns when the King's business wants you? Stand you there and listen to me, or by the God above me you shall never take meat or drink again. Do you see this, you craven?" and he plucked out his horrible horse-pistol and flourished the muzzle in my face. "Mark it, and remember that I am Ferguson, the famous Ferguson, Ferguson the plotter, and no little person to be thwarted! And now listen to me."

I could have wept with rage and despair, knowing that with every moment this wretch kept me my chance of fulfilling the appointment at Clerkenwell Gate was passing, and that if he detained me only one half-hour longer I must be late. To the pistol, however, and his scowling, truculent, blotched face that, lacking the wig, which hung on a chair beside him, was one degree more ugly than its wont, there was no answer, and I said sullenly that I would listen.

"You had better," he answered. "Mark you, there is a gentleman coming to see me; and to his coming and to what he says to me I will have a witness. You follow me?"

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"Yes," I said, looking round, but in vain, for a way of escape.

"And you are the witness. You shall go into that room, mark you, and you shall be as mute as a mouse ! I put this little cupboard open—the back is thin and there is a crack in it ; set your eye to that and you will see him. And look you, listen to every word, and note it ; and keep still—keep still, or it will be the worse for you, Mr. Price ! "

"Very well," I said obediently, hope springing up as I thought I saw a way of escape. "And what time must I be here ? "

"You are here, and you will stay here," he answered, dashing to the ground the scarce-born plan. "Why, man, he may come any minute."

"Still—if I could go out for—for two minutes," I persisted. "I should be easier."

"Go out ! Go out ! " he cried, interrupting me in a fury. "And dinners ? And taverns ? And you would be easier ! D'ye know, Mr. Price, I have my doubts about you ! Ay, I have ! " he continued, leering at me with his big, cunning eyes ; and now thrusting his face close to mine, now drawing it back again. "Are you for selling us, I wonder ? Mind you, if that is your thought, two can play at that game, and I have writing of yours. Ay, I have writing of yours, Mr. Price, and for two pence I would send it where it will hang you. So be careful. Be careful or—give me that coat."

Wishing that I had the courage to strike him in the back, praying that the next word he said might choke him, hating him with a dumb hatred, the blacker for its impotence and for the menial services he made me do him, I gave him the long-skirted plum-coloured coat to which he pointed, and saw him clothe his lank ungainly figure in it, and top all with his freshly curled wig. He bade me tie his points and fasten on his sword ; and this being done to his liking—and he was not very easy to please—he pulled down his ruffles, and walked to and fro, preening himself and looking a hundred times more

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ugly and loathsome for the finery with which, for the first time, I saw him bedizened.

Preparations so unusual, by awakening my curiosity as to the visitor in whose honour they were made, diverted me from my own troubles, to which I had done no more than return when a knock came at the outer door. Ferguson, in a flush of exultation that went far to show that he had entertained doubts of the visitor's coming, thrust me into the next room, a mere closet, ill-lighted by one small window, and bare, save for a bed-frame. Here he placed me beside the crack he had mentioned; and, whispering in my ear the most fearful threats and objurgations in case I moved, or proved false to him, he cast a last look round to assure himself that all was right; then he went back into his own apartment, where through my Judas-hole I saw him pause. The girl's departure with the luggage had left the room but meagrely furnished; whether this and the effect it might have on his visitor's mind struck him, or he began at the last moment to doubt the prudence of his enterprise, he stood awhile in the middle of the floor gnawing his nails, and listening, or perhaps thinking. The drift of his reflections, however, was soon made clear; for on the visitor impatiently repeating his summons, he moved stealthily to one of the windows—which being set in the mode of garret windows, deep in the slope of the roof, gave little light—and by piling his cloak in a heap on the sill he contrived to obscure some of that little. This done, and crying softly "Coming! Coming!" he hastened to the door and opened it, bowing and scraping with an immense show of humility.

The man who had knocked, and who walked in with an impatient step as if the waiting had been little to his taste, was tall and slight; for the rest, a cloak, and a hat flapped low over his face, hid both features and complexion. I noticed that Ferguson bowed again and humbly, but did not address him; and that the gentleman also kept silence until he had seen the door secured behind him. Then, and as his

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host, with seeming clumsiness, brushed past him and so secured a position with his back to the light, he asked sharply, "Where is he?"

The plotter leant his hands on the back of the chair and paused an instant before he answered. When he did he spoke with less assurance than I had ever heard him speak before; he even stammered a little. "Your Grace," he said, "has come to see a person—who—who wrote to you? From this house?"

"I have. Where is he?"

"Here."

"Here? But where, man, where?" the new-comer replied, looking quickly round.

Still Ferguson did not move. "My lord duke, you came here, in a word—to see Lord Middleton?" he said.

It was easy to see that the visitor's gorge rose at the other's manner, no less than at this naming of names. But with an effort he swallowed his chagrin. "If you know that, you know all," he answered with composure. "So without more, take me to him. But I may as well say, sir, since you seem to be in his confidence——"

"It was my hand wrote the letter."

"Was it so? Then you should know, sir, that a madder and more foolish thing was never done! If my Lord Middleton," the stranger continued coldly, his tone inclining to sarcasm rather than to feeling, "desired to ruin his best friend and the one most able to save him in a certain event—if he meant to requite, sir, one who has already suffered more than was reasonable in his service, by consigning him to destruction, he did well. Otherwise he was mad. Mad, or worse, to send such a letter to a place where he must know of his own knowledge that nine letters out of ten are opened by others' hands!"

"Your Grace is right," Ferguson answered drily, and in his natural voice; at the sound of which, either because of its native harshness or because it touched some chord in his memory, the other started. "But the fact is," the plotter continued hardily, and with

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a smack of impertinence, "my Lord Middleton, so far as I know, is still with the King at St. Germain's."

"At St. Germain's?" the stranger cried. "With the King?"

"Yes, and to be candid," Ferguson answered, "I was not aware, my lord, that you had sent him a safe conduct."

"You villain!" the duke cried, and stepped forward; his rage excited as much by the man's manner as by the trick which had been played him. "How dared you say, then, that he was here?" he continued. "Answer, fellow, or it will be the worse for you."

"I said only, your Grace," Ferguson replied, retreating a step, "that the writer of the letter was here."

For a moment the duke, utterly dumbfounded by this, stood looking at him. "And you are he?" he said at last, with chilling scorn, "and the author of this—plot!"

"And of many plots besides," my master answered jauntily. And then, "My lord, do you not know me yet?" he cried.

"Not I! Stand out, sir, and let me see your face. Then perhaps, if we have met before——"

"Oh, we have met before!" was the quick and impudent answer. "I am not ashamed of my face. It has been known in its time. But fair-play is a jewel, my lord. It is eight years since I saw your Grace last, and I have a fancy to learn if you are changed. Will you oblige me? If you would see my face, show me yours!"

With a gesture between contempt and impatience the duke removed the hat which at his entrance he had merely touched, and, hastily lowering the cloak from his neck, confronted his opponent.

CHAPTER XXI

It cannot at this time of day be needful for me to describe in detail the aspect of those features which the action disclosed, since they are as well remembered

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by many still living as they are faithfully preserved for posterity—lacking some of the glow and passion which then animated them—on the canvas by Sir Peter Lely, which hangs in the Charterhouse. The Duke of Shrewsbury—to set concealment aside—was then in his thirty-sixth year, in the prime and bloom of manhood, of a fair complexion and regular features, over which the habitude of high rank and the possession of unrivalled parts threw a cast of reserve and stateliness not unbecoming. As he was by nature so sensitive that on this side alone his enemies found him vulnerable, so his face in repose, if it had any blemish at all, had the fault of bordering on the womanish, the lines of his mouth following those of the choicest models of antiquity. But this blemish—if that which bore witness to the most affectionate disposition in the world could be called by that name—was little marked in public life; the awe which his eyes, alike firm and penetrating, inspired in the vulgar, rendering most people blind to it. To sum up, his face gave a just idea of his character, for, though indolent, he was of such a temper that the greatest dared take no liberty with him, and though proud he gave the meanest his rights and a place.

Such, in fine, was the man who now confronted Ferguson, and with a stern light in his eye bade the schemer stand out. That the latter from the first had intended to declare himself was as certain as that, now the time had come, he hesitated, awed by the mere power of worth, as I have heard that wicked men calling up spirits from the deep have stood affrighted before the very beings they have summoned. Yet this hesitation was for a moment only; after which, rallying the native audacity of a temperament which rejoiced in these intrigues and *dénouements*, he stepped jauntily forward, and assuming such a parody of dignity as likened his clumsy figure and sneaking face to nothing so much as an ape decked out in man's clothes, he allowed the light to fall on his features.

The duke looked, and even where I stood behind

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the lath and plaster partition I heard him catch his breath. "You are Robert Ferguson!" he said.

"Well guessed!" the plotter answered, with a harsh, discordant laugh. "Your Grace has not forgotten '88. Believe me, if the Prince of Orange had kept as good a memory, I should not have been in this garret, nor need I have troubled your lordship to visit me in it."

"It would have been better for you, sir, had you still refrained," the duke answered with severity.

"Mr. Ferguson, I tell you at once that I do not bear His Majesty's Commission in vain, and my first proceeding on leaving this house will be to sign a warrant for your apprehension, and direct the officers where it can be executed."

"And I, my lord," Ferguson answered with an impudent attempt at pleasantry, "have a very good mind to take you at your word, and let you go to do it. For when your officers arrived they would not find me, while your Grace would go hence to fall into as pretty a trap as was ever laid for a man."

"Doubtless, then, of your laying!" my lord cried, with a gesture of contempt.

"On the contrary, until I saw you, I knew of the trap indeed, but not for whom it was intended. Since I have seen you, however—and how greatly you have improved since '88, when we last met"—Ferguson added, impertinently—"my eyes are opened, and I feel a very sincere pity for your lordship."

"I am obliged to you for your warning," the duke answered, drily, "and will endeavour to take care of myself. If that be all, therefore, that you have to say to me—and I assume that the letter in Lord Middleton's name was no more than a ruse—I will say good-day."

"But that is not all, nor a part!" Ferguson replied. "I have a bargain to propose, and information"—this sullenly and with lowered eyes—"to give."

"As usual!" my lord answered, shrugging his shoulders, and speaking with the most cutting scorn.

"But permit me to say that you have made a mistake,

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Mr. Ferguson, in sending for me. You should know by this time, being versed in these affairs, that I leave such bargains to underlings."

"Nevertheless, to this bargain you must be a party," the other answered violently. "Nay, my lord, I can make you a party. I have only to tell you a thing I know; and, whether you will or no, for your own safety you must do what I ask."

"For my own safety, Mr. Ferguson, I am not in the habit of doing anything I would not do for other reasons," the duke answered coldly. "For the rest, if you have anything to tell me that concerns the King's service——"

"Which King's?" the plotter cried with a sneer.

"I acknowledge one only—then, I say, I will hear it. But I will neither do nor promise anything in return."

"You talk finely," Ferguson cried, "yet you cannot deny that before this I have told things that were worth knowing."

"That were worth men's lives!" my lord answered, speaking in a low stern voice, and looking at him with a strange abhorrence. "Yes, Mr. Ferguson, I acknowledge that. That were worth men's lives. And it reminds me that you are growing old, and have blood on your hands; you only and God know how much. But some I know; the proof of it lies in my office. If you will take my advice, therefore, you will think rather of quitting the world and making your peace with Heaven—if by any means it can be done—than of digging pits for better men than yourself. Man," he continued, looking fixedly at him, "do you never think of Ayloffe and Sidney? And Russell? And Monmouth? And Cornish? Of the men you have egged on to death, and the men you have—sold? God forgive you! God forgive you, for man never will!"

I should fail, and lamentably, were I to try to describe either the stern feeling with which my lord uttered this solemn address—the more solemn as it came from a young man to an old one—or the horrid

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passion born of rage, fear, and remorse commingled, with which the intriguer received it. When my lord had ceased to speak, Ferguson broke in with the most fearful imprecations, calling down vengeance not only on others for wrongs done to him, but on his own head if he had ever done aught but what was right; and this rant he so sprinkled with texts of scripture and scraps of the old Covenanters' language that for profanity and blasphemy I never heard the like. The duke, after watching the exhibition for a time with eyes of pity and reprobation, ended by setting on his hat and turning to the door. This sufficed—as nothing else would have—to bring the conspirator to his senses. With a hideous chuckle, which brought his tirade to a fitting conclusion, "Not so fast, my lord! Not so fast," he cried, slapping his pocket. "The key is here. I have something to say before you go."

"In God's name say it then!" the duke cried, his face sick with disgust.

"I will!" Ferguson answered, hoarsely, leaning on the table which stood between them and thrusting forward his chin, his face still suffused with rage. "And see you how I will confound you! The Duke of Berwick is in England. The Duke of Berwick is in London. And what is worse for you, my lord, he lies to-night at Dr. Lloyd's in Hogsden Gardens. So take that information to yourself, my Lord Secretary, and make what you can of it—not forgetting the King's interest! Ha! ha! I have you tight there, I think!"

His triumph, extreme and offensive as it was, seemed to be justified by the consternation—I can call it by no other name—which darkened the duke's countenance as he listened, and held him a moment speechless and motionless, glaring at the other. At last, "And *you* sent to me to tell me this?" he cried.

"I did! I did! There is no other living man would have thought of it or done it. And why? Because there is no man can play my cards but myself."

"You devil!" my lord cried; and was silent.

Seeing that I knew little more of this of which they

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spoke than that the Duke of Berwick was King James's natural son and favourite, I was at a loss to comprehend either the duke's chagrin or Ferguson's very evident triumph. The latter's next words, however, went far towards explaining his jubilation; and if they did not perfectly clear up my lord's position—fully to enter into which required a nobility of sentiment and a nicety of honour on a par with his own—they enabled me to guess where the shoe pinched.

"D'ye take me now, my lord?" the plotter cried, with a savage grimace. "That concerns the King's service, I think; and yet—I dare you to make use of it. Ay, my Lord Secretary, I dare you to make use of it!" he repeated, his unwholesome face deep red with excitement. "For why? Because you know that there will be a day of reckoning presently—and sooner, mayhap, than some think. You know that. Sooner or later it will come—it will come, and then 'Touch not mine anointed!' Or rather, touch but a hair of his Jamie's head, and His Majesty'll no forgive! He'll no forgive! There will be mercy for my Lord Devonshire, and my Lord Admiral, ay, and for that incarnate liar and devil, John Churchill! Ay, even for him, for he has made all safe both sides and so have the others. But do you touch the King's blood, though it be bastard—do you send to-night to the bishop's and take him, and go on to what follows—and you may kneel like Monmouth, and plead like my Lady Russell, and you'll to the axe and the sawdust, when the time comes! Ay, you will! you will! you will!"

Though his harsh voice rose almost to a shriek with the last words, and the room rang with them, the duke stood mutely regarding him, and made no answer. After an interval Ferguson himself went on, but in a lower tone. "That is the one course you may take, my lord," he said, "and the result of it! If you follow my advice, however, you will not adopt that course. Instead you will let Fitz-James be. You will act as if you had not seen me to-day, nor heard

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that he was in London. You'll wipe this meeting from your memory, and live as if it had not been. And so, at the restoration, you will have nothing to fear on that head. But—but in the meantime," Ferguson continued with an ugly grin, "it may be the worse for your Grace if the truth, and your knowledge of the truth, come to the Prince's ears, whose Minister you are; and worse again if it comes to Bentinck's, who, I am told, is some trouble to your Grace already."

The duke's face was a picture. "You villain!" he said again. "What do you want?"

"For my silence?"

"For your silence? No. What is your aim? What is your object? You betray one and the other. The son of your King to prison and death. Me, if you can, to ruin and shame. And why? Why, man? What do you gain?"

"What do I gain? What shall I gain, you mean," Ferguson answered, smiling cunningly. "Only your Grace's signature to a scrap of paper—give me that, and I am mum, and neither Berwick nor you will be a penny the worse."

"What, money?" cried my lord, surprised, I think.

"Oh, no, not money," said the plotter coolly. "And yet—it may be money's worth to me over there."

CHAPTER XXII

"It is this way, my lord," he continued after a pause. "Lord Middleton said some things over there in your Grace's name—that would be four years back; but you never acted on them, though it was whispered you paid dearly for them here. In the interval it has been the aim of a good many to get something more definite from your Grace; the rather as you stand almost alone, the main part of the Court, and more than you know, having made their peace. But the efforts of those persons failed with your Grace because

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they went about it in the wrong way. Now I, Robert Ferguson," the plotter continued, patting himself on the chest, and bowing with grotesque conceit, "have gone about it in the right way; and I shall not fail. The position is this. You must either arrest the Duke of Berwick, or you must let him go. That is clear. If you do the former, you offend beyond pardon, and your head will fall at the restoration, whoever goes clear. On the other hand, if you let the duke escape and it come to the Prince of Orange's ears that you knew of his presence, you will be ruined with your present party. The only course left to you, therefore, is to let him go, but to purchase my silence—that it may not reach the Prince's ears—by signing a few words on a paper, which shall be sealed here, and opened only by His Majesty in his closet. Now, my lord, what do you say to that?"

"That you are a fool as well as a knave!" was the duke's unexpected reply. He had recovered his equanimity, and took a pinch of snuff as he spoke.

The plotter's eyes sparkled. "Why?" he cried with an oath. "And is that language for a gentleman?"

"A gentleman? Faugh!" cried my lord. "And why? Because you suppose your word to be of value; whereas you should know that were you to go to Kensington and tell the King that you had informed me of this or that or the other, and were I to deny it, you would to Newgate for certain, and to the pillory perhaps—but I should be not a penny the worse. Your word, forsooth! Why, man, you are crazed!"

"Ay, but if I have had you followed here?" the other answered savagely. "If I can produce three witnesses to prove that you were with me to-day, and by stealth! And by stealth, my lord? What then?"

"Why, then this!" the duke answered with composure. "And it is my answer. I shall go hence to the King and tell him all; and on your information, Mr. Ferguson, the Duke of Berwick will be arrested. Whatever my fate or his after that, I shall have done my duty and kept my oath as a privy councillor, and the rest I leave to God! But for you," he continued

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slowly and with solemnity, "who to gain a hold on me have betrayed the son of your King, your fate be on your own head!"

The plotter, who, I think, had expected any answer but this, and, it may be, had never considered his own position should the duke stand firm, roared out a furious "You lie!" And then again in a frenzy, as the consequences rose more clearly before him, "You lie!" he cried, striking his hand on the table. "You will not do it! You will not dare to do it!"

"Mr. Ferguson," the duke answered haughtily, "I do not suffer persons of your condition to tell me what I dare, or do not dare; or persons of any condition to give me the lie. Be good enough to open the door!"

"Sign the paper!" the conspirator hissed. His face, at no time slightly, was now distorted by fear and the rage of defeat; while the chair on the back of which he leaned his left hand, jerked this way and that as if the palsy had him. "Sign the paper, will you? Or your blood be on your own head!"

The duke's only answer was to point to the door with his cane. "Open it!" he said, his breath coming a little quickly, but his manner otherwise unmoved. "Do you hear me?"

But either Ferguson's rage had so much the mastery of him that he could no longer control himself, or he was desperate, seeing into what an abyss the other's firmness was pushing him; or from the first he had determined on this course in the last resort. At any rate at that word, and instead of complying, he fell back a step and with a dark face drew a pistol from the pocket of his long coat. "Sign!" he cried, his voice whistling in his throat, as he levelled the arm at my lord's head. "Sign, you Roman spawn, or I'll spill your brains! Sign, or you don't go out of this room alive! Has the Lord's foot been put on the neck of his enemies that such as you should divide the spoil?"

There was nothing to sign, for he had not produced the paper. But in the delirium of fear and excitement

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into which he had fallen, he was unconscious of this, and of all except that he was in danger of falling into the pit he had digged for another. His hand shook so violently that every moment I expected the pistol to explode, with his will or without it; his fears no less than his despair putting my lord in danger. What he, who stood thus exposed to naked death, thought in his heart while his existence hung on a shaking finger I cannot say, or if he prayed; for no man talked less of religion, to be, as I trust he was, a believer; while the pride which supported him in that crisis was as powerful to close his lips after the event. "Put that down!" was all he said, and met the other's eyes without blenching, though I think that he was a trifle paler than he had been.

"Sign!" answered the madman with an oath.

"Put it down!" repeated the duke; and doubtless his courage by imposing a restraint on the other's headiness postponed, though it could not avert, the catastrophe.

For, every second they stood thus fronting one another, Ferguson grinning and gibbering to him to sign, I looked to see the pistol explode, and my lord fall lifeless. My knees shook under me; horrified at this murder to be committed under my eyes, scarce conscious what I did or would do, I fumbled for the handle of the door—which luckily was beside me—and found it precisely as the duke, with a twirl of his cane as swift as it was unexpected, knocked the pistol aside and sprang bodily on the villain, striving to bear him down. He had no time to draw his sword.

He was the younger man by twenty years and the more active, if not the more powerful; so that for an instant it seemed that the danger was over. But I counted without Ferguson, who, leaping back before the other could grapple with him, with a nimbleness beyond his years put the table between them, and levelling the pistol afresh with a snarl of rage, pulled the trigger. The flint snapped harmlessly!

More than that I could not bear, and, by Heaven's mercy, the movement had brought the wretch close

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to the door at which I stood, and which I had that moment opened. As he aimed the pistol a second time, and with a fresh execration, I flung my arms round him from behind, and with my right hand jerked up the pistol, which exploded, bringing down a rush of plaster and filling the room with smoke and brimstone.

An interposition so sudden and timely must have been no less a surprise to the duke than to Ferguson. Nevertheless, the former, without the loss of a moment, flung himself on his antagonist, and seizing the pistol, while I clung to him behind, in a twinkling he had him disarmed. Yet, even when this was done, so furious were the man's struggles, and so inhuman the strength he displayed (even to biting and foaming in a fury that could only be called maniacal), that it was as much as we could both do to conquer him, though we were two to one, and younger. Nor would he be quiet or resign himself to defeat until we had him down on his back, with my lord's sword-point at his throat.

Then it was that while we stood over him panting and trembling with the exertions we had made, my lord turned his eyes on me. "My friend," he said "who are you?"

I could not speak for emotion; and though he was calmer, I could see that he was deeply stirred, both by the risk he had run and the narrowness of his escape. "My lord," I cried, at last, "take me away!"

"From here?" he said.

"Yes," I said, "for God's sake, for God's sake, take me away!" and I burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing, so overcome was I by what had happened, and what had almost happened.

He looked at me, his lip twitching a little, and his breast heaving. "Be easy, man," he said. "Were you set to watch me?"

"Yes," I said.

"And heard you all?"

"All."

"Who are you?" he said again.

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"Two months ago I was an honest man," I answered bitterly, "and then I got into *his* clutches. And he has ridden me. Ah, how he has ridden me!"

"I see," he said, nodding gravely. "Well, his riding days are over. Hark you, Mr. Ferguson," he continued, turning to the prostrate man, who, grovelling before us—I had taken the precaution of tying his hands with my garters—acknowledged his attention by a hollow groan, "I am no thief-taker, and I shall not soil my hands with you. But within an hour the messengers will be here, and if they find you, look to yourself, for I think that in that case you will indubitably hang. In the meantime I will take your pistol." Then to me, "Come, my man," he said, "if you wish to go with me."

"I do," I cried.

"Well, I owe you more than that," he answered kindly. "And I need you, besides. Mr. Ferguson, I bid you farewell. You have proved yourself a more foolish man than I thought you—a worse you could not. The best I can wish you is that you may never see my face again."

CHAPTER XXIII

My lord, I found, had a coach, without arms or insignia, waiting for him at the Great Turnstile in Holborn, where, if persons recognised him as he alighted, he would be taken to have business with the lawyers in Lincoln's Inn, or at my Lord Somers's in the Fields. Following him to the coach on foot, I never saw a man walk in more deep of anxious thought. He took no heed of me, after bidding me by a gesture to attend him; but twice he stood in doubt, and once he made as if he would return whence we had come, and once as if he would cross the Fields—I think to Powis House. In the end he went on, and arriving at the coach, the door of which was opened for him by a footman in a plain livery, he bade me by a sign to follow him into it. This I was

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not for doing, thinking it too great an honour; but on his crying impatiently, "Man, how do you think I am to talk to you if you ride outside?" I hastened to enter, in equal confusion and humility.

Nevertheless, some time elapsed and we had travelled the length of Holborn before he spoke. Then rousing himself on a sudden from his pre-occupation, he looked at me. "Do you know a man called Barclay?" said he.

"No, your Grace," I answered.

"Sir George Barclay?"

"No, your Grace."

"Or Porter? Or Charnock? Or King?"

"No, your Grace."

"Umph!" said he, seeming to be disappointed; and for a time he looked out of the window. Presently, however, he glanced at me again, and so sharply that I dropped my eyes, out of respect. "I have seen you before," he said, at last.

Surprised beyond measure that he remembered me, so many years having elapsed, I confessed with emotion that he had.

"Where?" he asked plainly. "I see many people. And I have not old Rowley's memory."

I told him. "Your Grace may not remember it," I said, greatly moved, "but many years ago at Abbot's Stanstead, at Sir Baldwin Winston's——"

"What?" he exclaimed, cutting me short, with a flicker of laughter in his grave eyes. And he looked me over. "Did I flesh my maiden justice-sword on you? Were you the lad who ran away?"

"Yes, my lord—the lad whose life you saved," I answered.

"Well then, we are quits," he had the kindness to answer; and asked me how I had lived since those days.

I told him, naming Mr. Timothy Brome, and saying that he would give me a character. The mention of the news-writer, however, had a different effect from that I expected; his Grace conceiving a hasty idea that he also was concerned with Ferguson, and muttering under this impression that if such men were

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turning, it was vain to fight against the stream. I hastened to disabuse him of the notion by explaining how I came to fall into Ferguson's hands. On which he asked me what I had done for the plotter, and how he had employed me.

"He would send me on errands," I answered, "and to fetch papers from the printers, and to carry his messages."

"To coffee-houses?"

"Often, your Grace."

"Did he ever send you to Covent Garden?" he asked, looking fixedly at me.

"Yes, your Grace, to a gentleman with a white handkerchief hanging from his pocket."

"Ha!" said he; and with an eager light in his face he bade me tell him all I knew of that man. This giving me the cue, I detailed what I had seen and heard at the "Seven Stars" the previous evening, the toast of the Squeezing of the Rotten Orange, the hints which had escaped the drunken conspirator, not forgetting his references to the Hunting Party, and the date, Saturday or Saturday week. I added also what I had learned from the girl, but mentioned for this no authority. To all my lord listened attentively, nodding from moment to moment, and at last, "Then Porter is not lying this time," he said, drawing a deep breath. "I feared—but here we are. Follow me, my friend, and keep close to me."

Engrossed in my story, and the attention that was due to his rank, I had paid no heed either to the way we had come or to our gradual passage from the smoke and babble of London to country air and stillness. A vague notion that we were still travelling the Oxford Road was all I retained: and this was rudely shaken when, recalled to the present by his words, I looked out, and discovered that the coach was bowling along an avenue of lofty trees, with park-like pastures stretched on either hand. I had no more than time to note so much and that the horses were slackening their pace, before we rumbled under an archway, and drew up in a spacious courtyard shut in on four sides

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by warm-looking red-brick buildings, whereof the wing under which we had driven was surmounted by a quaintly shaped bell-turret.

Ignorant where my lord lived, and little acquainted with the villages which lie around London, I supposed that he had brought me to his house. The sight of a couple of sentries, who walked with arms ported before a wide, low flight of steps leading to the principal door, should have enlightened me; but a flock of pigeons, that, disturbed by our entrance, were now settling down, and beginning to strut the gravel with the most absurd air of possession, caught my attention, and diverted me from this mark of State. Nor did a knot of servants, lounging silently under a portico, or two or three sedans which I espied waiting a little apart, go far to detract from the general air of peace and quietude which prevailed in the place. Other observations I had no time to make, for my lord, mounting the steps, bade me follow him.

I did so, across a spacious hall floored with shining wood laid in strange patterns. Here were three or four servants who stood at attention, but did not approach; and passing them without notice, we had reached the foot of a wide and handsome staircase before a person dressed plainly in black and carrying a tall slender wand came forward, and with a low bow interposed himself.

"Your Grace's pardon," he said, "the Council has broken up."

"How long?"

"About half an hour."

"Ah! And Lord Somers? Did he go back to town?"

"Yes, your Grace, immediately."

The duke at that asked a question which I, standing back a little out of respect, and being awed besides by the grandeur of the place and the silence, did not catch. The answer, however, "Only Lord Portland and Mr. Sewell," I heard; and likewise the duke's rejoinder, "I am going up."

"You will permit me to announce your Grace,"

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the other answered quickly. He seemed to be something between a gentleman and a servant.

"No," my lord said. "I am in haste, and I have that will be my warranty. This person goes with me."

"I hope your Grace—will answer for it then," the man in black replied respectfully, but with a little hesitation in his tone.

"I will answer for it that you are not blamed, Nash," the duke rejoined, with good nature. "Yes, yes. And now let us up."

On that the man with the wand stood aside—still a little doubtfully, I thought—and let us pass; and, my patron preceding me, we went up a wide staircase and along a silent corridor, and through one or two swing doors, the duke seeming to be conversant with the house. It was impossible not to admire the sombre richness of the carved furniture, which stood here and there in the corridor; or the grotesque designs and eastern colouring of the China ware and Mogul idols that peered from the corners or rose boldly on brackets. Such a mode of furnishing was new to me, but neither its novelty nor the evidences of wealth and taste which abundantly met the eye impressed me so deeply as the stillness which everywhere prevailed, and which seemed so much a part of the place, that when his Grace opened the second swing door, and the shrill piping voice of a child, crowing and laughing in an ecstasy of infantile pleasure, came forth and met us, I started as if a gun had exploded.

I know now that the sound, by giving my patron assurance that he whom he sought was not there, but in his closet, led to my admission, and that without that assurance my lord would have left me to wait at the door. As it was, he said nothing to me, but went on; and I, following him in my innocence through the doorway, came, at the same moment he did, on a scene as rare as it is by me well remembered.

We stood on the threshold of a wide and splendid gallery, set here and there with huge china vases, and

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hung with pictures; which even then I discerned to be of great beauty, and afterwards learned were of no less value. Letting my eyes travel down this vista, they paused naturally on a spot under one of the windows, where, with his back to us and ribbons in his hands, a slight gentleman, who stooped somewhat and was dressed in black, ambled and paced in front of a child of four or five years old. The wintry sunlight, which fell in cold bars on the floor, proved his progress to be more showy than real; nevertheless the child shrieked in its joy, and dancing jerked the ribbons and waved a tiny whip. In answer, the gentleman, whose long curled periwig bobbed oddly on his shoulders—he had his back to us—pranced more and more stoutly, though on legs a little thin and bent.

A long moment I stared at this picture, little thinking on what I gazed; nor was it until a gentleman—seated at a side table at no great distance from the pair—rose from his chair and with a guttural exclamation came towards us that I remarked this third occupant of the gallery. When I did so, it was to discern that he was angry, and that my lord also appeared taken aback and disturbed. It even seemed to me that my patron made a hasty movement as if to withdraw. Before he could do so, however, or I—who behind him barred the way—could take the hint, the gentleman in black, warned of our presence by his companion's exclamation, turned to us, and still standing and holding the ribbons in hands, looked at us.

He had a long sallow face, which seemed the sallower for the dark heavy wig that fell round it; a large hooked nose and full peevish lips; and eyes both bright and morose. I am told that he seldom smiled, and never laughed; and that in old days while the best tales of King Charles's Court passed round him, he would stand abstracted, or on occasion would wither the teller by a silent nod. The Court wits who dubbed my Lord Nottingham "Don Dismallo" could find no worse title for him. Yet that he had

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a well of humour, deeply hidden and rarely drawn upon, no one could doubt who saw him as he approached us, a flicker of dry amusement in his eyes giving the lie to his pursed-up lips and the grimness of his visage.

"Your Grace is always welcome," he said, speaking in English a little broken and guttural. "And yet—you might have come more *à propos*, I confess."

"A thousand pardons, sir," my lord answered, bowing until his knee well-nigh touched the ground. "I thought that you were in your closet, sir, or I should have taken your pleasure before I intruded."

"You have news?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ha! And this person"—he looked fixedly at me—"is concerned?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, my Lord Buck——" and with that he turned and addressed the child who was still tugging at the ribbons, "*Il faut partir!* Do you hear me, you must go? Go, *petit vaurien!* I have business."

The child looked at him boldly. "*Faut-il?*" said he.

"*Oui! oui!* Say *merci*, and go."

"*Merci, Monsieur,*" the boy answered. And then to us with a solemn nod. "*J'ai eu sa Majesté* for my chevaux!"

"Cheval! Cheval!" corrected the gentleman in black. "And be off! Be off!"

CHAPTER XXIV

APPRISED by what I heard, not only that I stood in the Gallery of Kensington Court—a mansion which His Majesty had lately bought from Lord Nottingham but that the gentleman in black whom I had found so simply employed was the King himself, I ask you to imagine with what interest I looked upon him. He whom the old King of France had dubbed in bitter derision the "Little Squire of Huninghen," and whom two revolutions had successively created Stadt-

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holder of Holland and Sovereign of these Isles, was at this time forty-six years old, already prematurely bent, and a prey to the asthma which afflicted his later life. Reserved in manner, and sombre, not to say melancholy, in aspect, hiding strong passions behind a pale mask of stoicism as chilling to his friends as it was baffling to his enemies, he was such as a youth spent under the eyes of watchful foes, and a manhood in the prosecution of weighty and secret designs, had made him. Descended on the one side from William the Silent, on the other from the great Henry of France, he was thought to exhibit, in a more moderate degree, the virtues and failings which marked those famous princes; and to represent, not in blood only, but in his fortunes, the two soldiers of the sixteenth century whose courage in disaster and skill in defeat still passed for a proverb, and who, frequently beaten in the field, as often garnered the fruits of the campaign, and rose, Antæus-like, the stronger from every fall. That, in all stations, as a private man, a Stadtholder and a King, his late Majesty remembered the sources whence he sprang was proved, in my opinion, not only by the exactness with which he wrought his life to the pattern of the old mottoes of his house—*Sævis tranquillus in Undis*, and *Tandem fit Surculus arbor*, whereof the former was borne, I have read, by the Taciturn, and the latter by Maurice of Nassau—but by two other particulars which I beg leave to mention. The first was that naturally and from the first he took the lead as the champion of the Protestant religion in Europe; the second, that though born in a Republic, and called to be King by election—so that it was no uncommon thing for some of his subjects to put slights upon him as little more than their equal—ay, and though he had to bear such affronts in silence—he had the true spirit and pride of a King born in the purple and by right divine. Insomuch that many attributed to this the gloom and reserve of his manners; maintaining that they were assumed less as a shield against the malice of his enemies than as a cloak to abate the familiarity of his friends.

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And certainly some, speaking of him of late years, belittle his birth no less than his exploits, when they call him Dutch William, and talk of him in terms unworthy of a sovereign, as if he drew his blood from that merchant race, instead of—as the fact was—from the princely houses of Stuart, Bourbon, Nassau, and Medici; from such ancestors as the noble Coligny, and King Charles the Martyr. But of this, enough. The facts are well known.

For the rest, having a story to tell, and not history to write, I refrain from a more particular description; nor will I recount, though I well remember, how great he was as a statesman, how resourceful as a strategist, how indomitable as a commander, how valiant, when occasion required, in the pitched field. Nor is it necessary to be particular; seeing that before the rise of my Lord Marlborough (who still survives, though, alas, *quantum mutatus ab ipso*!) he had no rival in any of these capacities, nor in the first will ever be excelled.

Nor, as a fact, looking on him as I then did for the first time, can I say that I saw much to betoken greatness, or the least outside evidence of the fiery spirit that in two great wars stayed all the power of Louis and of France; that saved Holland; that united Europe in three great leagues; that finally, leaping the bounds of the probable, won a kingdom, only to hold it cheap and a means to farther ends. I say I saw in him not the least trace of this; but only a plain, thin, grave, and rather peevish gentleman, in black and a large wig, who coughed much between his words, spoke with a foreign accent, and often lapsed into French or some strange tongue.

He waited until the door had fallen to behind the child, and the long gallery lay silent round us. Then he bade my lord speak. "I breathe better here," he said, coughing. "I hate small rooms. What is the news you have brought?"

"No good news, sir," my patron answered. "And yet—I can scarcely call it bad. In the country it will have a good effect."

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"*Bien!* What is it?"

"I have seen Ferguson, sir."

"Then you have seen a d——d scoundrel!" the King said curtly. "He is arrested?"

"No, sir," the duke answered. "But I trust he will be before night."

"If he be free, then, how came you in his company?" the King asked, somewhat sharply.

My lord hesitated, and seemed for a moment at a loss how to answer. From my station behind him, I could not see his face; but I fancied that he grew red, and that the fourth person present, a stout, burly gentleman, marked with the smallpox, who had advanced to listen the better, and now stood near the King, was hard put to it not to smile. At last, "I received a letter, sir," my lord said, speaking stiffly and with constraint, "purporting to come from a third person——"

"Ah!" said the King, drawling the word through his nose, and nodding comprehension.

"On the faith of which, believing it to be from that other—if you understand, sir——"

"I understand perfectly," said the King, and coughed drily.

"I was induced," my lord continued doggedly, "to give the villain a meeting. And have learned, sir, partly from him and partly from this person, enough to corroborate the main points of Mr. Prendergast's story."

"Ah?" said the King. "Good. And in what particulars do they confirm him?"

"That Sir George Barclay, the person mentioned by Mr. Prendergast, is giving nightly rendezvous in Covent Garden to persons mainly from France, who are being formed by him into a band, with the design, as stated by Prendergast, to fall on your Majesty's person in the lane between Fulham Green and the river on your return from hunting."

"Does he agree as to the names?" the King asked, looking at me.

"He knows no names, sir," the duke answered,

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"but he saw a number of the conspirators at the 'Seven Stars' in Covent Garden last night, and heard them speak openly of a hunting party; with hints and other things pointing to a serious design."

"Was Barclay there?"

"He can speak to a person who I think can be identified as Barclay," my lord answered. "He cannot speak to Charnock——"

"That is the Oxford man?"

"Yes, sir—or Porter, or King; or the others by those names. But he can speak to two of them under the names by which Prendergast said that they were passing."

"*C'est tout!* Well, it does not seem to me to be so simple!" the King said with a touch of impatience. "What is this person's name, and who is he?"

The duke told him that I had been Ferguson's tool.

"That rogue is in it, then?"

"He is privy to it," the duke answered cautiously.

The King shrugged his shoulders, as if the answer annoyed him. "You English draw fine distinctions," he said contemptuously. "Whatever you do, however, let us have no repetition of the Lancashire fiasco. You will bear that in mind, my lord, if you please. Another of Taafe's pseudo-plots would do us more harm in the country than the loss of a battle in Flanders. Faugh! We have knaves at home, but you have a breed here—your Oateses and your Taafes and your Fullers—for whom breaking on the wheel is too good!"

"There are rogues, sir, in all countries," my lord answered, somewhat tartly. "I do not know that we have a monopoly of them."

"The Duke of Shrewsbury is right there," the gentleman behind the King struck in, in a good-natured tone. "They are things of which there is no scarcity anywhere, sir. I remember——"

"*Taisez! Taisez!*"—cried the King brusquely, cutting short these reminiscences—whereat the gentleman, smiling imperturbably, took snuff. "Tell me this. Is Sir John Fenwick implicated?"

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"There may be evidence against him," my lord answered.

The King sneered. "Yes," he said. "I understand. Porter and Goodman and Charnock are guilty! But when it touches one of yourselves, my lord, then 'There is evidence against him,' or 'It is a case of suspicion,' or—oh, you all hang together!" And pursing up his lips, he looked sourly at us. "You all hang together!" he repeated. "I stand to be shot at—*c'est dommage*. But touch a noble, and *Gare la Noblesse!*"

"You do us an injustice, sir," my lord cried. "I will answer for it——"

"Oh, I do you an injustice, do I?" the King said peevishly, disregarding his last words. "Of course I do! You are all faithful, most faithful. You have all taken the oath. But I tell you, my lord, the King to whom you swore allegiance, the King who was crowned in '89, was not William the Third, but Noblesse the first! *La Noblesse!* Yes, my lord, you may look at me," he continued stubbornly, "and as angrily as you like; but it was so. *Par Dieu et diable*, you tie my hands! You tie my hands, you cling to my sword, you choke my purse! I had as much power in Holland as I have here. And more! And more!"

He would have said more, and with the same candour I think; but at that point, and while he paused to take breath, the gentleman who had interrupted him before, struck in, addressing him rapidly in what I took to be Dutch, and doubtless pointed out the danger of too great openness. At any rate I took that to be the gist of his words; not only from his manner, but from the fact that when he had done—the King looking gloomy and answering nothing—he turned to my lord.

"The King trusts your Grace," he said bluntly. "He has never said as much to an Englishman before. I am sure that the trust is well placed and that His Majesty's feelings will go no farther."

The duke bowed. "His Majesty authorises me

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to take the necessary steps then?" he said, speaking drily, but otherwise ignoring what had passed. "To secure his safety, as well as to arrest the guilty, no time should be lost. Warrants should be issued immediately, and these persons taken up."

"Before Ferguson can warn them?" the King said in his ordinary tone. "Yes, see to it, my lord; and let the Council be recalled. The guards, too, should be doubled, and the regiment Prendergast mentioned displaced. Cutts must look to that; and do you, my lord," he continued, addressing the gentleman beside him, whom I now conjectured to be Lord Portland, "fetch him hither and lose no time. Take one of my coaches. It is a plot, if all be true, should do us good in the country. That, I think, is your Grace's opinion?"

"It should, sir. I do not deny that we English have our faults; but we are not fond of assassins."

"You are confident that this is no bubble?" the King said thoughtfully.

"Yes, sir, I am."

Lord Portland had already withdrawn through a door at the farther end of the gallery; and the King, taking a turn this way and that, with his hands clasped behind him, and his head bent low—so that his great wig almost hid his features—seemed to be lost in thought. After waiting a moment the duke coughed, and this failing to attract the King's attention, he ventured to address him. "There is another matter I have to mention to you, sir," he said; speaking with a slight catch in his voice.

The King paused in his walk, and looked sharply at him. "Ah, of course," he said, nodding. "Did you see Lord Middleton?"

The duke could not hide a start. "Lord Middleton, sir?" he faltered.

The King smiled coldly. "The letter," he said, "was from him, I suppose?"

My lord rallied himself. "No, sir, it was not," he answered, with a flash of spirit. "It purported to be from him."

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"Yet you went—wherever you went—thinking to see him?" His Majesty continued; and he wrinkled his face disagreeably.

"I did," my lord answered, his tone betraying agitation. "But designing to do nothing to the prejudice of your service, sir, and what I could to further your interests—short of giving Lord Middleton up. He is my relative."

The King shrugged his shoulders.

"And for years," my lord continued, "was my intimate friend."

The King shrugged his shoulders again. "We have fought that out before," he said, with a sigh of weariness. "And more than once. For the rest, in that connection and whatever others may say, Lord Shrewsbury has no ground to complain of me."

"I have cause, sir, to do far otherwise!" the duke answered, in a tone so changed and so full of emotion that it was not difficult to discern that he had forgotten my presence, which was natural enough, as I stood behind him in the shadow of the doorway, whither out of modesty I had retreated. "God knows I remember it!" he continued. "Were it not for that, were I not bound to your Majesty by more than common ties of gratitude, I should not be to-day in a service which is—for which I am unfit. The daily duties of which, performed by other men with indifference or appetite, fill me with pity and distaste! the risks attending which—I speak without ceremony—make me play the coward a hundred times a day!"

"Cæsar," the King said quietly, "lets none but Cæsar call him coward."

Kindly as the words were uttered, and in a tone differing much from that which the King had hitherto used, the duke took no heed of them. "Others wish for my place; God knows I wish they had it!" he cried, his agitation growing rather than decreasing. "Every hour, sir, I pray to be quit of the faction and perjury in which I live! Every hour I loathe more deeply the work I have to do and the people with

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whom I have to do it. I never go to the office but my gorge rises; nor leave it but I see the end. And yet I must stay in it! I must stay in it! I tell you, sir," he continued impetuously, "on the day that you burned those letters you but freed me from one slavery to fling me into another!"

"An honest one!" said the King in a peculiar tone.

My lord threw up his hands. "You have a right—to say that, sir," he cried. "But if anyone else—or, no, I—I forget myself."

"Something has disturbed you," the King said, intervening with the utmost kindness. "Take time! And in the meanwhile, listen to me, and think of what I say. As to the general distaste you express for my service, I will not, and shall not, do you the injustice to attribute it—whatever you say yourself—to your fear of what may happen in a possible event; in a word, in the event of a restoration. If such fear weighed heavily with you you would neither have signed the invitation to me, nor come to me in person eight years ago. But I take it that along with some apprehensions of this kind, you have—and this is the gist of the matter—a natural distaste for affairs, and a natural proneness to be on good terms with all, rogues as well as good men. It irks you, my lord, to sign a death-warrant, to send one to Newgate, and another to—bah, I forget the names of your prisons; and to know that your friends abroad are not as well placed at St. Germain's as they were at St. James's! You have no care to push an advantage, no anxiety to ruin a rival; you would rather trust a man than bind him. In a word, my lord, you have no taste for public life in dangerous and troubled times, although, unwillingly and perforce, you have played a high part in it."

"Sir!" the duke cried, with an anxiety and eagerness that touched me, "you know me better than I know myself. You see my failings, my unfitness, my misgivings; and surely, seeing them so clearly, understanding them so well, you will not refuse to——"

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"Release you?" the King said. "Ah, that does not follow. For consider, my lord. You are not the only one in the world who pursues perforce a path for which he has little taste. To be King of England has a higher sound than to be Stadtholder of Holland. But to be a King and no King; to see your way clearly and be thwarted by those who see no foot of the field; to have France by the throat and be baffled for the lack of ten thousand men or a million guilders; above all, to be served by men who have made use of you; who have one foot on either shore; who, having betrayed their old Master to gain their ends, would now betray their new one to save their necks. This, too, forms no bed of roses! But I lie on it! I lie on it!" he concluded phlegmatically; and as he spoke he took a pinch of snuff. "In fine, my lord," he continued, when he had dusted his lip, "to be high, or what the world calls high—is to be unhappy."

The duke sighed. "You, sir," he said sadly, "have those qualities which fit you for your part. I have not."

"Have I?"

The King said no more, but the gesture with which he held out his hands as if he bade the other mark his feebleness, his short breath, his hacking cough, his pallor, had more meaning than many words. "No, my lord," he continued after a pause that was not wanting in pathos, "I cannot release you. I cannot afford to release you, because I cannot afford to release the one man who does not day by day betray me; the one man who never has betrayed me!"

"I would to heaven that you could say that, sir!" the duke cried.

"I can, my friend," the King answered, with a gesture of kindness. "It was nothing, and it is forgotten. I have long ceased to think of it. But, *c'est vrai!* I remember, when I say I can trust no one else that I do my good Somers an injustice. But he is a dry man, like myself, and poor company; and counts for little."

My lord, contending with his feelings, made no

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reply to this; and the King who, in the course of his speech, had seated himself in a high-backed chair, in which he looked frailer and more feeble than when on his legs, let a minute elapse before he resumed. Then, in a different and brisker tone, "And now tell me what has troubled our good Secretary to-day?" he said.

"The Duke of Berwick, sir, is in London."

To my astonishment, and I have no doubt to the duke's, the King merely nodded. "Ah!" he said. "Is he, too, in this pretty plot, then?"

"I think not," the duke answered. "But I suppose——"

"That he is here to take advantage of it," the King rejoined. "Well, he is his uncle's own nephew. I suppose Ferguson sold him to you—as he has sold everyone all his life?"

"Yes, sir. But not with the intention, I fancy, that I should carry out the bargain."

"How then?"

"It is a long tale, sir," the duke said rather wearily. "And having given your Majesty the information——"

"You need not tell the tale? Well, no; for I can guess it!" the King answered. "The old rogue, I have no doubt, was for ruining you with me if you hid the news; and for damning you with King James if you informed: which he did not think likely, and so he would have a hold on you."

The duke in a tone of surprise acknowledged that His Majesty had guessed rightly.

"Well, it was a very pretty dilemma," said the King with a sort of gusto. "And where is M. Fitz-James in hiding?"

"At Dr. Lloyd's in Hogsden Gardens," my lord answered with ill-concealed reluctance.

"He must be arrested," said the King. "A warrant must be issued. Will you see to it with the others?"

The duke assented; but with so deep a sigh that it required no wizard to discern both the cloud that hung

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over him and also that, now he had done what Ferguson had dared him to do, the consequences lay heavy on him.

The King, after considering him a moment with an expression between amusement and reproach, broke the silence.

"See here, my lord," he said, with good nature. "I will tell you what to do. Sit down now, and here, and write a line to Monsieur, bidding him begone; and send it by a private hand, and the warrant by a messenger an hour later."

The duke stared at the King in astonishment. "He will then escape, sir," he faltered.

"So much the better," the King answered indifferently. "If we take him what are we to do with him? Besides—to tell you the truth, my lord, he did me a great service eight years ago."

"He, sir?"

"Yes," said the King, smiling. "He induced his father to fly the country, when, if he had stayed—but you know that story. So do you warn him, and the sooner he is beyond La Manche the better."

The duke looked unhappy. "I dare not do it, sir," he said at last.

"Dare not do it? When I authorise it? Why not?"

"Because, sir, were I impeached by the Commons——"

The King shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, these safeguards!" he muttered. "These town councils and provincial councils and States-General! And now these Commons and Lords! Shall I ever be quit of them? Shall I ever have done with them? However—there is but one way then. I must do it. If they impeach me, I return to Loo; and they may stew in their own juice!"

He rose with that, and moving stiffly to the table at which Lord Portland had been writing when we entered, he sought for and found a pen. Then sitting in the chair which the Groom of the Stole had left vacant, he tore a slip of paper from a folio before him

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and, writing some lines on it—about six, as far as I could judge—handed the paper to the duke, who had remained, standing at a formal distance.

“*Voila, Monsieur,*” he said. “Will that suit your lordship?”

The duke took it respectfully and looked at it. “But, sir, it is in my name!” he cried, aghast. “Am I to sign it?”

“*Eh, bien*, why not?” His Majesty answered lightly. “The name is the name of Jacob, but the hand is the hand of Esau. Take it and send it by a trusty messenger. Perhaps the man who came with you, and who—*diable!* I had forgotten that this person was here! We have spoken too freely.”

The oath which fell from the duke’s lips, and the face of dismay and anger with which he gazed on me, were proof that he shared the King’s opinion, as he had shared his mistake. For a moment, the two glaring at me with equal disgust and vexation, I thought that I should sink into the floor. Then the King beckoned to me to come forward, and I obeyed him.

Reluctantly; it is true the odd glimpse of generosity which the King had allowed to escape in his interview with the duke somewhat lessened the fears I must otherwise have entertained. And to this must be added that I am one of those who, when violence and physical danger are not in question, retain a fair mastery of their minds. Nevertheless, I confess that as I went forward, I wished myself anywhere else in the world than there; and would have sacrificed half my remaining economies to be seated, pen in hand and obscurely safe, in Mr. Brome’s room.

But the thing took a turn which relieved me when I least expected it. For as I approached, the chagrin in the King’s face gave place to a look of surprise; and that again, but more slowly, changed to one of intelligence. “*Ah! Je me trompais!*” he muttered rapidly. “What did you say his name was?”

“Price,” the duke answered, continuing to glower at me.

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"Price? *Ah, cela va sans dire!* But he—he is a cadet—a dependent? He is in some way connected—how do you say it—related to your family?"

"To mine, sir!" the duke exclaimed in a voice of the utmost astonishment; and he drew himself up as if the King had pricked him with a pin.

"*N'est-ce pas ça?*" His Majesty replied, looking from one to the other of us. "Yet he has so much a look of you that it might be possible in some lights to take him for your Grace—were he differently dressed!"

The duke looked purely offended. "Your Majesty is under a strange misapprehension," he said stiffly. "If this person resembles me—of which I am not aware—I know nothing of the cause; and the likeness, for what it is worth, must be accidental. As a fact, I never saw him but once before in my life, sir; and that perfectly by chance." And he very briefly related the circumstances under which we had come together.

The King listened to the story, but as if he scarcely believed it; and he smiled when the duke came to tell how he allowed me to escape. Then, "And you have never seen him from that day to this?" he said.

"Never!" the duke answered positively. "Nevertheless it is not my intention to lose sight of him again."

"Ah?" the King said.

"I have not told you, sir, all that happened," the duke continued, reading, I think, the King's thoughts and resenting them. "To put it briefly, Mr. Ferguson, who has come to be little short of a madman, drew a pistol on me at the close of our interview; and but for this friend here—who had been placed to listen, but at that broke from his place of hiding and knocked up the muzzle—I should have come off ill."

"And I not much better," the King answered, nodding and looking grave. "You are unhurt?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that puts another face on it; and if you are retaining him beside you, what he has heard will be of the less importance. Hark you, my friend," he

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continued, addressing me, " can you keep your mouth shut ? "

I said humbly that I could and would.

" Then, *taisez ! taisez !* " he answered emphatically. " And take this letter to Hogsden Gardens to Bishop Lloyd's. See Bishop Lloyd and put it in his hands. Say nothing, give no message, but go to your master's in St. James's Square. Will you seal it, duke, with a plain seal ? Good. And go you out, my man, by the way you came in, and answer no questions. So ! And now for the Council and the warrants, my lord. We have lost too much time already ! "

CHAPTER XXV

To say that I went from the presence without knowing how I did it, and that when I reached the courtyard I had no more idea by what staircase I had descended than if I had been blind, is but the truth ; nor is it to be wondered at, when the amazing thing which had happened to me is in the least degree weighed or considered. In truth I walked on air and saw nothing, I was so deeply overjoyed, and though it is certain that as I went out I met one and another, passed the sentries, and ran the gauntlet of curious eyes—for who that quits a court escapes that ordeal ?—I was no more conscious of the observations made upon me, or of the surprise I excited, than if I had really walked in the clouds. Issuing from the gates I took, by instinct rather than design, the road to London, and, hugging to my breast the letter which the King—the King !—had entrusted to me, made the best of my way towards Tyburn.

I had been wiser had I gone by the other road through the village and taken the first coach I found ; there are commonly one or two at Kensington waiting to carry passengers to London. But in the fluster of my spirits I did not measure the distance, or the time I should consume in walking. My main anxiety at the moment was to be alone ; alone, and at leisure to

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probe my fortune and success, to appreciate both the relief and the good luck I had compassed. I could have sung as I walked; I could have skipped and danced; and a gleam of sunshine breaking the March sky and gilding the leafless arms of the trees and the flat green pastures that border the road north of Hyde Park, I was moved to raise my hat and reverently thank Providence for this wonderful instance of its goodness; which I had not had the heart to do for some time.

When I descended to earth again—a step which was hastened by a flash of recollection that showed me Ferguson's niece waiting at Clerkenwell Gate, a little figure, forlorn and desolate, yet with eyes of wrath and a face puckered with determination—when I came I say a little to myself and to think of Hogsden Gardens, and remembered that it lay on the farther side of town by Bunhill Fields, I was already at Tyburn turning; and it seemed to be no longer worth while to ride. The day was on the wane, and the road thence to St. Giles's Pound was lively with persons come out to take the air. Through these I threaded my way at a good pace, and coming to Holborn turned up Cow Lane, and so got speedily to Smithfield, and across the market to Long Lane. I knew my way so far without having need to ask.

Here, however, I took sudden fright. My mind, which had been busy with the girl and the steps I should take to find her—if indeed I wished to find her, about which I was puzzled, my circumstances being now so different—was invaded by the notion that I had been long on the road. To this was added next moment the reflection that messengers sent to arrest the duke might forestall me by taking a coach. The mere thought threw me into a hot fit, and this increased on me when I considered that I did not know the remainder of the road, and might waste time in tracing it. My first impulse in this strait was to seek a guide; and I looked before and behind me. But Long Lane by Smithfield is only one degree better than Whetstone Park, and I shrank from applying to the sots and drabs who stood at the doors or lounged

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out of the patched windows and lazily watched me go by.

In this difficulty, and growing more diffident and alarmed the more slowly I walked, I looked about eagerly for some person of passable aspect of whom I could inquire. I saw none; and my uncertain glances and loitering steps were beginning to draw on me advances and an attention that were anything but welcome, when I reached a corner where an alley, now removed—I think it was then called Dog Alley—runs out of Long Lane. Here, as I paused, I saw a man, decently habited, come out of a house a little way down the alley. He closed the door behind him, and, as I looked, turned, and went off in the opposite direction.

This was my opportunity. Without losing a moment I ran after him, and he, hearing my steps, turned; and we came sharply face to face. Then—and then only, when it was too late to retreat—I saw with unutterable dismay that the man I had stopped was no stranger, but the person who had dressed me up the night before and taken me to the mysterious house in the suburbs—the man called Smith, whom I had first seen under the Piazza in Covent Garden, and again in Ferguson's room!

To come face to face with anyone of the gang was enough to make my knees tremble under me; for had I not just informed against them? But of this man, though his civil treatment had been a pleasant contrast to Ferguson's brutality, I had conceived an instinctive dread; based as much on his reserve and on a secret power with which I credited him as on his contemptuous treatment of my tyrant. In a word, had I come on Ferguson himself I could scarcely have been more overcome. On first hearing my footsteps the man had turned on me very sharply, with the air of one who had no mind to be followed and no taste for followers. But, seeing who it was, his face grew light and he whistled his surprise. "I was on my way to you," he said, "and here you are. This is good luck. I suppose Ferguson sent you?"

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"No," I stammered, avoiding his eyes, and wondering, with inward quakings, what was going to happen to me. "I—I lost my road."

"Oh!" said he, and looked keenly at me. "Lost your road, did you? Well, it was very much to the purpose, as it happens. May I ask where you were going?"

I shifted my feet uneasily. "To Bunhill Fields," I said, naming the first place in that neighbourhood of which I could think.

"Ah!" he answered; and though it seemed scarcely possible that he could fail to observe the heat and disorder into which his presence threw me, he made no sign. "Well, you are not far out," he went on heartily, "and I will come with you. When you have done your errand we will talk over my business. This is your way. I know this end of the town well. And so," he added with a sharp look at me, "it was not Ferguson who sent you after me?"

"No," I said.

"Nor his errand that brought you to this part?"

"No," I said again, my lips dry. "And I need not give you the trouble of coming with me. I shall be taking you——"

"Out of my way? Not at all," he answered briskly. "And it is no trouble. Come along, my friend."

I dared say no more, nor show further reluctance; and, with feet like lead and eyes roving furtively for a way of escape, I turned and went with him. Nay, it was not my feet only that were weighted; the letter, and my consciousness of it, lay so heavy on my mind it was like lead in the pocket.

I was indeed in a strait now! And in one so difficult I could discern no way out of it. I could in part, and in part only, command my countenance, but I failed absolutely to command my thoughts; which did nothing but revolve tumultuously round the words, "What am I to do? What am I to do?" Words that seemed written in red letters on my brain. Only one thing was clear in the confusion, and that

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was the urgent necessity of hiding my errand; the disclosure of which must carry with it the discovery of the place whence I came and the company I had been keeping. With time to think and coolness to distinguish I should have seen the possibility of avowing my errand to the duke, while laying it on Ferguson's shoulders; but pushed for time and unable at a pinch to weigh all the issues, I could form no determination, much less one leading to so daring a step.

In the meantime we moved on; and at first my companion seemed to be unconscious of my sluggish pace and my perturbation. But presently I felt rather than saw that from minute to minute he glanced at me askance; and that after each of these inspections he laughed silently. The knowledge of this, and that I lay under his observation, immeasurably increased my embarrassment. I could no longer put a fair face on the matter; but every time he looked at me I looked away guiltily, unable to support his eyes. This presently grew to be so insupportable that to escape from my embarrassment I coughed and affected to choke.

"You have a cold, I am afraid," he said, scarcely concealing the sneer in his tone. "And yet—you look warm. You must have walked fast, my friend."

I muttered that I had.

"To overtake me, perhaps! It was good of you," he said, in the same tone of badinage. "But here we are. What part of the Fields do you want? White-cross Street?"

"No," I muttered.

"Then it must be Baxter's Rents?"

"No, I think not."

"Bunhill Row, then?"

"No, I think not."

"No? Well, there is not much else," he said; and he shrugged his shoulders, "except the Fields and the burial-ground. Your business does not lie with the latter, I suppose?"

"No," I said faintly. And we stood.

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At another time I must have shuddered at the dreary expanse that on this uttermost fringe of the town stretched before us under a waning light; an expanse of waste and weeds broken only by the dead wall of the burial-ground or the chimney of a brick-kiln, and bordered, where its limits were visible, by half-built houses, and squatters' huts, and vast piles of refuse. Ugly as the prospect was, however, and far from reassuring to the timorous, I asked nothing better then to look at it, and look at it, and continue to look at it. But Mr. Smith, who did not understand this mood, turned with an impatient laugh.

"I suppose that you did not come here to look at that," said he.

Like a fool I jumped at the absurd, the flimsy pretext.

"Yes," I said. "I—I came to take the air."

The moment the words were spoken I trembled at my audacity. But he took it better than I expected, for he only paused to stare at me, and then chuckled grimly.

"Well," he said, "then, now that you have taken the air we will go back. Have you anything to object to that, Mr. Taylor?"

I could find nothing.

"I will come with you," he continued. "I want to see Ferguson, and we can settle my business there."

But this only presented to me a dreadful vision of Ferguson, released from his bonds, and mad with rage; and I stopped short.

"I am not going to him," I said.

"No," said he. "Then where, may I ask, are you going?" And he watched me with a placid amusement, which made it as clear as the daylight that he saw through my evasions. "Where is it my lord's pleasure to go?"

"To Brome's—in Fleet Street," I muttered hoarsely. And if he had had his back to me at that instant, and I a knife in my hand, I could have run him through! For as I said it, and he assented, and we stepped out together to return the way we had come through

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Long Lane—over which the sky hung low in a dull yellow haze, the last of the western light—I had a swift and stinging recollection of the King, and my lord, and the letter, and the passage of time; and could have turned on him and poured out curses on him in the impotence of my rage and impatience. For the hour of grace which the King had granted was gone, and a second was passing; and still the letter that should warn the Duke of Berwick lay in my pocket, and I saw no chance of delivering it.

That Smith discerned the chagrin which this enforced companionship caused me—though not the ground of it—was as plain as that the fact gave him pleasure. I had no longer such a command of my features that I could trust myself to look at him; but I was conscious, using some other sense, that he frequently looked at me; and that always after these inspections he smiled like a man who finds something to his taste. And I hated him.

How long with these feelings I could have borne to go with him, or what I should have done in the last resort, remains unproved; for at the same corner half-way down Long Lane, where I had first espied him, he paused. "I want to go in here," he said. "I need only detain you a moment, Mr. Taylor."

"I will wait for you," I muttered, tingling with sudden hope. While he was inside I could run for it! "Very well," he said. "This way."

I fancied that he suspected nothing, I fancied even that I had been wrong throughout; and overjoyed I went with him to the door of the house from which I had seen him emerge; my intention being to flee hotfoot the instant his back was turned. The house was three-storeyed, high, narrow, and commonplace, one of a row not long built. Apparently he was at home there, for taking a key from his pocket, he opened the door; and stood aside for me to enter.

"I will wait," I said.

"Very well. You can wait inside," he answered.

If I had been wise I should have turned there and then, in the open street, and taking to my heels have

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run for my life and stayed for nothing. But, partly fool and partly fearful, clinging to a hope which was scarcely a belief—that when he went upstairs or into another room, I might unlatch the door and begone—I let myself be persuaded; and I entered. The moment I had done so, he whipped out the key and, thrusting the door to with his shoulder, locked it on the inside.

Then he threw off all disguise. With a laugh of triumph he turned to where I stood, trembling, in the half-dark passage. "Now," he said, "we will have that letter, if you please, Mr. Taylor. I have a fancy to see what is in it."

"That letter?" I faltered.

"Yes, that letter!"

"I have no letter," I said.

"Pooh! Letter or no letter, out with it! Do you think I could see you touching your breast every half-minute to make sure that you had it, and not know what was in the wind? You are a poor plotter, Mr. Taylor, and I doubt if you will ever be of any use to me. But come, out with it—unless you want me to be rough with you. Out with whatever you have and no tricks."

He had a way with him when he spoke in that tone, not loudly but between his teeth, his eyes at the same time growing towards one another, that was worse than Ferguson's pistol; and I was alone with him in an empty house. Some, who would have done what I did, will blame me; but in the main the world is sensible, and I shall forfeit no prudent man's esteem when I confess that, after one attempt at evasion—which he met by wrenching my coat open, and thrusting me against the wall so violently that my head spun—I gave up the letter.

"I warn you! I warn you!" I cried, in a paroxysm of rage and grief. "It is for the Duke of Berwick, and if you open it——"

"For the Duke of Berwick?" he cried, pausing and gazing at me with his finger on the seal. "Why, you fool, why did you not tell me that before? From whom? From that scum, Ferguson?"

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"From the Duke of Shrewsbury," I answered, rendered reckless by rage.

"What?" he cried, in a voice of supreme surprise.

"From the Duke of Shrewsbury," I repeated, thinking that he had not understood me.

"My God!" he said, with a deep breath. "And have I caught my lord at last!"

"You are more likely to be caught yourself," I answered furiously.

He took no heed of that, but merely signing to me to follow him, he sprang up the stairs; and opening a door led the way into a back room bare and miserable, but lighted by the last yellow glow of sunset. It was possible to read here, and without a moment's hesitation he broke the seal of the letter, and, tearing the packet open, read the contents.

I could see that the perusal gave him satisfaction; his face, which in the level light cast by the window seemed to gleam with joy, no less than his movements, bearing witness to this. Flourishing the letter in great excitement he twice strode the floor, muttering unformed sentences. Then he looked at the paper again and his jaw fell. "But it is not his hand!" he cried, staring at it in dismay. And then recovering himself, "No matter," he said. "No matter! It is his name, and his signature, and the veriest fool would have used another hand. Is it yours? Did you write it, blockhead?"

"No! Then how—thousand devils, how did you come by it? By this—eh?" he rapped out. "This letter? What d——d hocus pocus is here? What have you to do with the Duke of Shrewsbury that he makes you his messenger?"

He stretched out his hand as if he would shake the truth out of me; and I knew that I had never been in greater danger in my life. Yet something of wit came to me in this extremity. Comprehending that if I said I came from Kensington I might expect the worst, I lied to him; yet cunningly used the truth where it suited me. "The duke came to Ferguson's," I stammered.

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"To Ferguson's?" he answered, staring at me.

"Yes, and bade him get that letter to the duke; for his lodging was known and warrants would be out."

Smith clapped his hands softly. "What!" he cried. "Is he in it as deep as that? Oh, the cunning of him! And I to be going to all this trouble and subtlety, and close on despair at that! And so—Ferguson gave you the letter?"

"They both did."

"The old fox, too! And I was beginning to think him a bygone! Why he beats us all! he beats us all! Or he would have beaten us if he had not trusted this silly. But I am forgetting. The duke must be warned—if he has not started. When was this given to you, Mr. Trusty Taylor?"

"Two hours ago," I said sullenly.

"Two hours!" he said; and I was pleased to see that that alarmed him. "You fool!" he said, "why did you not tell me at once what you had got, and whither you were going? If the duke is taken it will lie at your door. And if he is saved—ha, ha! it will be to my credit."

"I will come with you," I said, plucking up a spirit as I saw him about to leave.

"No, you will not," he answered, coolly repulsing me. "I am much obliged to you, but I prefer to gain the credit and tell the tale my own way. You will stay here, Mr. Taylor; and when the duke is away I'll come and release you. In the meantime I would advise you to keep quiet. Hoity-toity, what is this?" he continued, as in my despair I tried to push by him. "Go back, you fool, or it will be the worse for you. You are *not* going out."

With that, resisting all my appeals, he thrust me forcibly from the door; and, whipping outside it, locked it on me. In vain I hammered on it with my fist and called after him, and even threatened him. With a mocking laugh he clattered down the stair, and I heard the house-door slammed and locked. I listened a moment after that, but all remained quiet; and then, wild with rage, I turned to the

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window, thinking that I might escape that way. Alas ! it looked only into a walled yard, and was strongly barred.

Then, God knows, I thought myself the most unlucky of men ; a man ruined on the point of a great success. I flung myself on the floor in my despair ; I could have dashed my head against the boards. But presently, in the midst of my bewailing myself, and when the first convulsive fit of rage was abating, a new thought brought me to my feet, my teeth chattering. What if Smith, before he returned, fell in with Ferguson ? The meeting was the more probable since, if Ferguson succeeded in freeing himself, he was as likely to hasten to the Duke of Berwick to warn him as to do anything else. At any rate, I was not inclined to sit weighing the chances ; on the contrary, hastening frantically to the door, I tried it with knee and shoulder. To my joy it yielded somewhat ; on which, throwing caution aside, I flung myself against it with all my weight. The lock gave way, and, the door flying open, I came near to falling down the stairs.

Still, I had succeeded. But I soon found that I was no nearer freedom then before. The passage was dark, and the house-door, when I had groped my way to it, resisted all my efforts. This drove me to seek another egress, if such a thing existed. In the dark the search was not easy, but at length, and by dint of groping about, I hit on a door which led into a downstairs room ; it was unlocked, and I entered, feeling before me with my hands. I trod cautiously across the room to where the window should be, and sought for and presently found the shutters. I tried the bar, and to my joy felt it swing. I let it down and dragged the shutters open, and with a sigh of relief saw through the leaded panes the dark, dull lane outside, with a faint light from a neighbouring window gleaming on the wall opposite.

I was seeking for a part of the window that would open, and wondering whether, if I did not find one, I should have the courage to burst the casement and

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run for it, when a step approaching along the lane set my heart beating. The step came nearer and paused; and peering out, my face close to the glass, I saw a man had come to a stand before the door. After that, to say that my knees quivered under me but faintly expresses the terror I felt! For as the man moved he brought himself within the circle of light I have mentioned, and at the same time he raised his face, and through the glass my eyes met those of Ferguson.

CHAPTER XXVI

IF a few minutes before I had thought myself the most unlucky of men and placed beyond fear or misfortune by that which had happened, I knew better when I saw that sight from the window. I fell back into the darkness, as if even from the road and through the panes Ferguson's eyes must discover me. Ignorant whether the room in which I stood contained anything to shelter me, or barewalled must discover me to the first person who entered with a light, my natural impulse, when the moment of panic passed, was to escape from it.

But to do this in haste was not easy. By the time that, trembling in every limb, I had groped my way into the passage the key was turning in the lock of the outer door, and I saw myself within an arm's length of capture. This so terrified me that I sprang desperately for the staircase, but stumbling over the lowest step, fell on my knees with a crash that seemed to shake the walls. For a moment the pain was so sharp that I could only lie where I fell; nor when, spurred by the imminence of the danger, I had got to my feet, could I do more than crawl up the stairs and crouch down on the landing, a little to one side, and out of eyeshot from below.

Willingly now would I have forgiven Fortune all her past buffets in return for present safety, for if Ferguson came up, as I thought him sure to come up, I was lost. I could neither retreat

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without noise, nor, if I could, knew where to hide. In this extremity, my heart beating so thickly that I thought I must choke, I was relieved to hear Ferguson—after spending what seemed to me to be an age striking flint and steel in the passage—go grumbling into the lower room; where a glimmer falling on the wall of the passage told me that he had at last succeeded in procuring a light.

It was no surprise to me to learn that he was in the worst of tempers. I heard him swear at the open shutter; then, almost before I had thanked Providence for present safety, he was out again in the passage. I made no doubt that he was going to ascend now, and I gave myself up for lost. Instead, he stood and called "Mary, Mary!" Then, "Do ye hear, you hussy? If ye are hiding above there it will be the worse for you, you d——d baggage! Come down, d'ye hear me?"

Now, I thought, getting no answer, he would come up; and my heart stood. But it seemed he called only to make sure, and not because he thought that she was above; for he went back into the lower room, and I heard him moving to and fro, and going about to light a fire, the crackling of which gave an odd note of cheerfulness in the house. I was beginning to weigh the possibility of slipping by the door, on the chance of finding the outer one unfastened, and had actually risen to my feet when a key grated in the lock, and, supposing it to be Smith, I sank back into my former position.

Had it been Smith, it would have been some comfort to me; for I thought him more prudent if no less dangerous than the plotter, and fancied that I had more to fear from one than from two. But the step that entered was lighter than a man's; and in a moment Ferguson's greeting told the rest and made the situation clear.

"Ha, you are here at last, are you!" he cried with an angry oath. "Did you want me to break every bone in your body, lass, that you stayed out till now, and I to have the fire to light? You should have a

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pretty good tale to tell or have kept clear of this! D'ye hear me? Speak, you viper, and don't stand there, glowering like a wood-cat!"

"I am here now," was the sullen answer. My heart leapt, for the voice was Mary's; the weary tone I could understand.

"Here now!" he retorted. "And that is to be all, is it? Perhaps, my girl, I will presently show you two minds about that. Where is the baggage?"

"I have not brought it."

"Not brought it?" he cried.

"No," she answered.

"And why not, you Jezebel?"

"You need not misname me," she answered, coolly. "I was followed and could not come here; and I could not carry it with me all day. And I could not send it, for there was no one here to take it in. It is at the 'Spread Eagle' in Gracechurch Street, to go by to-morrow's wagon to Colchester. That is what I told them, but it can be fetched away in the morning."

"If I did not think you were a big liar, girl," he answered doubtfully; but I knew by his tone that he believed her.

"You may think what you like," she replied.

"And how do you suppose I am to do for to-night?" he answered, querulously.

"You must do as you can," she said. "You have your Hollands, and I have brought some bread and meat."

"It is a dog's life," he said, with a snarl.

"It is the life you choose," she retorted.

He paused awhile in sheer astonishment at her audacity. Then, "*Peste!*" he cried. "What is it to you, you slut?"

"Why, a dog's life too! and not of my choice!" she answered passionately, her voice breaking. "What am I better than an orange-girl in the streets? What do I get?—and walk the pavement on your errands night and day! What do I get?—and always hiding and sneaking, hiding and sneaking! And for what?"

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"For your living, you graceless baggage!" he roared. "Who feeds you and clothes you, you hussy? Who boards you and lodges you, and finds you in meat and malt, you feckless toad? You shameless——"

"Ay, call names!" she answered, bitterly—and it was not hard to discern that she was almost beside herself with the long sick waiting and the disappointment. "It is what you are good for! It is all that your plots end in! Call names, and you are happy! But I am tired, and tired of it, I tell you. I am tired of bare boards and hiding, and all for what? For those that, when you have brought them back, you will be as fierce to oust as you are now to restore! And shameless it is you call me?" she continued with feverish rapidity. "Shameless? Have you not sent me into the streets a hundred times, and close on midnight, and not a thought or care what happened to me so long as your letter went safe? Have you not sent me where to be taken was to be jailed and whipped, and not a thought of pity or what a life it was for a girl? Have you not done this and more?" she continued, breathless with passion. "And more? And *you* take praise for feeding me! *You* call me graceless and shameless!"

She paused and gave him room to speak; but though he put on a show of bluster it was evident her violence alarmed him. "Odd's name, and what is all this?" he said. "What ails the girl? What has set you up now, you vixen?"

"You!" she cried, vehemently. "You and your trade!"

"Well," he said, with a sort of sullen reasonableness, "and what is the matter with the trade? What is wrong with the trade, I say? I'll tell you this, my lass, you would live badly without it."

"I would live honestly," she cried. "And as my father lived."

"You drab!" he cried. "Leave that alone."

Judging from the tone of his voice I expected him to break out with fresh oaths and curses, but instead an astonishing silence fell on the two. It fell for me

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at an unlucky moment; for, forgetting, in my keen desire to see as well as hear, the risk I ran, I had crept down the stairs, and now lacked but a pace of seeing into the room. The noise ceasing, I dared neither take that step nor retreat; and it was only when the silence had continued so long that curiosity overcame fear, that I ventured the advance, and, looking in, saw that the girl, her fire and fury gone, was leaning against the wall beside the hearth, her face averted; while Ferguson himself, in an attitude of dejection scarcely less marked, stood near her, his head bowed and his bloodshot eyes fixed on the fire.

"Ay, he lived honestly, your father," he muttered at last. "It is true, my lass. True it is. But—he had a fair wind, had Alan, and a short course; and if he had lived to be sixty, God knows! We are what we are made. I mind him well, and the burn we fished and the pickle things we took out, and your mother that played with us in her cutty sark, and not a shoe between us nor a bodle of money; but the green hills around us, and all we knew of the world that it lay beyond them. And that was all your father ever knew, my lass. And well for him! Ay, well for him! But woe's me! and woe to the man who took my living! and woe to the evil King!"

His voice was beginning to rise; in a moment he would have reached his native pitch of denunciation, of which even now some of his many writings afford a pale reflection. But at the word *King* there came a sharp knocking at the door, and he paused. For me, I turned in a panic, and, heedless what noise I made, I hurried up the stairs. The steps creaked under me; but fortunately the knocking was repeated so quickly and persistently that it covered the sound of my flight, and I had safely ensconced myself in the old place before Ferguson, doubtless in obedience to some signal, appeared in the passage and opened the door.

Immediately half a dozen men poured in, growling in low tones; and passed into the room below. Until the outer door was closed and secured, I could

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catch nothing, though fear sharpened my ears. Then, as Ferguson went in after them, one of the new comers raised his voice in answer to a question. "What is up?" he cried with a rattling oath. "What is up, old fox? Why, all is up! And we'll swing for it before the month is over, if we cannot clear out to-night! You are a clever one, Mr. Ferguson, but you are caught this time, with better men. God! if I had the sneak here that peached on us I would cut his liver out! I would——"

Two or three voices joined in to the same tune, and drowned his words; one asking where Prendergast was, another where Porter was, a third indulging in threats so horrid and blasphemies so profane that I turned cold where I crouched. And no wonder; I began to understand what had happened, and my situation. But that nothing might be spared me Ferguson, in a quavering voice, that proved all was news to him, asked again what was the matter.

"The blues are moved," cried three or four, speaking at once. "They were marching out when we left," cried another. "The guards at Kensington are doubled, and the orders for the King's hunting to-morrow are cancelled. They were hurrying to and fro calling the Council when we came away, and messengers were beginning to go round the taverns."

"Ay, and they have seized the horses at the 'King of Bohemia's Head,'" added another, "so they know a lot."

"But is it—certain?" Ferguson asked, with a break in his voice.

"As certain as that we shall hang for it if we do not get over!" was the brutal answer.

"And the Captain?"

"I have been at his lodgings. He has not been heard of since noon. He ordered his horse then, and they say took the road. And hell to it, if that is so, he is half-way to France by this! And safe! Safe, you devils, and we are left here caught like rats!"

"Ay, we'll go farther than France," one shrieked. "As for me, I am off, I shall go, and——"

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"No, by God, you don't!" cried another; and flung himself, as it seemed to me, between the first speaker and the door. "You don't go and sell the rest of us, and save your own neck."

"Where is Porter, then?"

"And Prendergast?"

"Not here! Nor Sir William! Nor Friend! So what is the good of talking like that?"

"He will make a fat hang, will Sir William!" said one, with a mad laugh that died in his throat. "It will cure his gout."

At that one of the others cried with furious oaths for liquor; and I judged that Ferguson gave them of his hollands. But it was little among so many, and was gone in a moment, and they calling for more. "There is a keg upstairs," said he, feebly. "In the back room. But get it for yourselves. You have hung me. To think that I should have played the game with such fools!"

They laughed recklessly, a savage note in their voices. "Ay, you should have stuck to your pen, old fox," one cried. "Then it was only the printer hung. But we'll drink your health before you swing. Up, Keyes, and fetch the stuff. It may be bad, but we'll drink to the squeezing of the Rotten Orange once more; if it be the last toast I drink."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE terror that had gripped me on their first entrance, and driving all the blood in my body to my heart, had there set it bounding madly—this I should vainly describe to persons who have never been in such a situation or within a few feet of death. That, reckless and driven to the wall, the conspirators would sacrifice me to their vengeance if they discovered me I felt certain; and at any moment they might come up and discover me. Yet behind me were the confining walls of the house whence I knew of no exit; and before me, where alone evasion

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seemed to be possible, the open door, and the flood of light that issued from the doorway, forbade the attempt. I lay sweating and listening, therefore, while they snarled and cursed in the black mood of men betrayed and hopeless; yet because of the chance that after all they might go out as they had come, I had so far kept my terror within bounds.

Not so, when I heard Ferguson bid the man mount and fetch the keg. With prudence, I might still have controlled myself and kept quiet; and holding my breath though I were suffocated, and silencing my heart though I died, I might have lain and let him pass—supposing he brought no light. Nay, had I crouched low, he might have not observed me with a light; for I was a little beside the stairhead, and to enter the room whence I had broken out he need not face me. But when I heard him stumbling upwards, a sudden horror of the loneliness of the house came on me, with an overwhelming perception of my helplessness and of the life and death struggle to which the men below were committed—so that death seemed to be in the air; which together so far overcame me that I did the last thing I intended to do. As the man came up the stairs, a light in his hand, I rose up and stood, gasping at him.

He paused and held up the light. "The devil!" he said, staring. And then, "Who the —— are you? Oh! I see. Here, Ferguson! Here's your man!"

The answer from below was a roar for liquor.

"What are you doing here?" the man with the light went on, puzzled as much by my silence as my presence.

"I am—going," I stammered. A desperate hope rose in my breast at sight of the man's perplexity. He might let me pass.

For aught I know he would have done so; and it is impossible that I might have gone unseen by the open door and gained the street. But as he stood, staring, a second man came into the passage, and looked up and saw me. "Hallo!" he said. "Who is that?"

"Ferguson's man," Keyes answered. "But, boil me, if I know what is the matter with him!"

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The other called Ferguson, and he came out, and looked; looked, and knew me, and with a scream of rage sprang up the stairs. In the first fury of wrath he threw himself on me so suddenly and with so much violence and intention that I was a child in his hands; and but for the others' exertions, who (not understanding the matter), tore him from me, I must have been choked out of hand. As it was I was black in the face, dizzy, and scarcely conscious when they freed me from him; nor in much better case for the respite. For with all they could do he would not release my shoulder; but dragging me down, he cried breathlessly and continuously to the others to listen—to listen! That he had the traitor! that I was the informer! the spy! the blood-seller! And with that, and as he partly forced and partly hauled me down the stairs, the men thickened round me, until dragged into the lighted room I found myself hemmed in by a ring of lowering faces, a ring that, look where I might, presented no breach or chance of escape, no face that pitied or understood. He who seemed to be in highest authority among them—afterwards I knew him for Charnock, the unfrocked Fellow of Magdalen, who suffered later with King and Keyes—did indeed make Ferguson let me go; thrusting him back and calling on him to tell his tale, and have done with his blasphemy. But though I turned that way in momentary hope of aid, I read no encouragement in a face as stern and relentless as it was fanatical. A lamp hooked high on one wall obscured half the circle and flung a bright glare on the other half; but in light or shade, seen or unseen, and whether drink flushed it, or passion blanched it, every face that met my shrinking gaze seemed to be instinct with doom.

In such situations fear, which spurs some minds, paralyses others. Vainly I tried to think, to frame a defence, to deny or avoid. The glare of the lamp dazzled and confused me. To Ferguson's passionate iterations, "The Lord has delivered him into our hands! I tell you, the Lord has delivered him into our hands! There is your informer! There is

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your traitor ! ” I could find but one answer—a feeble, “ I am not ! I am not ! ” This I continued to repeat—while one plucked me this way that he might see me better, and another that way—until Keyes struck me on the mouth, and thrusting me back bade me be silent.

“ And you, too, Mr. Ferguson,” Charnock said, raising his hand to still the tumult, “ have done with your swearing, and talk plainly. Say what you know, and have no fear ; if what you allege be proved, we will do justice on him.”

“ Ay, by —— ! ” cried Cassel. “ A life for a life.”

“ But, first, what do you know ? ” Charnock continued, brusquely. “ Speak to the point. We must be gone by midnight if we are to save ourselves.”

Then, and then only, I think, Ferguson, hitherto blinded by rage, became sensible of the fact that he stood himself in a dubious position ; that to tell all, and particularly to reveal the visit which the Secretary had paid to him at his lodgings, would place his conduct in a light far from favourable. Not only were the men before him in no mood to draw fine distinctions, but it was on the credit of his name and as his tool that I had come to be mixed up in the matter and gained my knowledge of it. It took no great acuteness, therefore, to foresee that their suspicions, once roused, they would punish first and prove afterwards, and be as ready to turn on the master as the man.

Such—when I came to review the scene afterwards, coolly and in safety—were, I had no doubt, the reflections that gave Ferguson pause at the last moment ; and that occasioned a kind of fit into which he fell at this juncture—his eyes glaring, his jaw moving dumbly, and his hands springing out in uncouth gestures, like those of a man half paralysed—a fit which at the time was set down to pure rage and a temper of mind always bordering on the insane. But, probably, under cover of that display, his crafty brain, apt in such crises, did its work ; for when he found his voice he had his tale pat : and

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where truth and a lie most ingeniously and sometimes inexplicably mixed would scarcely serve his turn to win him credence, he imposed on his hearers, even on Charnock, by pure scorn and an air of superior knowledge.

"What I know," said he, "you shall know. It is enough to blast him ten times. To-day it happened that the Secretary came to my lodgings."

For a moment the roar of surprise which followed the statement silenced him. But in a moment he recovered himself.

"Ay!" he said, looking round him, defiantly. "The Secretary. What of it? Do you think that you know everything, or that everything is told to you? To-day, I say, the Duke of Shrewsbury came to my lodgings."

"Why?" cried Charnock, between his teeth. "Why? Answer me that!"

"Why?" Ferguson answered. "Well, if you will have it, to send a message through me to the other duke, as he has done three times before since his Grace has been in England."

"To the Duke of Berwick?"

"What other Duke is there?" the plotter asked, scornfully.

"But, by G——! If the Secretary knows that his Grace is in England—"

"Well?"

"What will he not know?"

"I cannot say what he will not know, Mr. Charnock," the plotter answered, with a superior smile that brought his wig to his eyebrows, "but I can say what he did not know. He knew nothing of your little business. For the rest, when he left me I missed my man here, and coming to inquire, learned that he had been seen to join the Secretary at the door of the house, speak to him, and go away with him. That was enough for me. I changed my lodging, slipped away here, and had been here an hour when you came. As soon as you said that someone had peached to-day I guessed who it was.

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Then Keyes cried that he was here, and there he was."

"But how did he come to be here?" Charnock asked, sternly, and with suspicion.

"God knows!" said Ferguson, shrugging his shoulders; "I don't."

"You did not bring him?"

"Go to, for a fool! Perhaps he came to listen, perhaps he was sent. He knew of this place. For the rest, I have told you all I know, and it is enough, or should be. Hang the dog up! There is a beam and a hook. You hound, you shall swing for it!" he shrieked, bringing his crimson, blotched face close to mine, and threatening me with his swollen fingers. "You thought to outwit me, did you? You, you dog! You crossed me and thought to sell me, did you? You dolt! you zany! You are sold yourself! Sold, and shall swing! Swing! Swing and rot; ay, and so shall all my enemies perish!"

"An end to that," said Charnock, pushing him away roughly. "All the same, if this is true, he *shall* swing."

"I can say it is true!" cried a man thrusting himself forward, while with shaking knees and chattering teeth, and tongue that refused to do its work, I strove to speak, to say or do something—something that might arrest the instant doom that threatened me. "It is true enough," he continued, coolly. "I was on the watch at Kensington this afternoon, and saw the Secretary arrive and go in to the Dutchman. And he had this bully boy with him. I know him again, and can swear to him."

CHAPTER XXVIII

I AM sure that it is one thing to confront with calmness a death that is known to be inevitable, and quite another and a more difficult thing to assume the same brow where hope and a chance remain. I am not ashamed, therefore, that in a crisis which

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amply justified all the horror and repugnance which mortals feel at the prospect of sudden and violent dissolution, I fell below the heroic standard, and said and did things, *miles impar Achilli*.

Nevertheless, it is with no good will I dwell on the matter; in writing, as in life, there are decencies; things to be told and others to be implied. Let few words suffice then, alike for the moment when Charnock, holding back the others, wrung from me, half swooning as I was, the admission that I had been to Kensington; and for those minutes of frenzied terror which followed, when, screaming and struggling in their grasp, now trying to fling myself down, and now shrieking for mercy, I was dragged to a spot below the hook, and held there by relentless fingers while a rope was fetched from the next-room. I had no vision; as I have read that some have, of the things done in my life; but the dark faces that hemmed me in under the light, the grim looks of one, and the pallor of another—even Ferguson's hideous visage as he hovered in the background, biting his nails between terror and exultation—all these, and enlarged and multiplied, I saw with a dreadful clearness; a keenness of vision that of itself was torture.

"Oh, God!" I cried at last. "Help! Help!" For from man I could see no help.

"Ay, man, pray," said Charnock, inexorably. "Pray, for you must die. We will give you one minute. Here is the rope. Who will fasten it?"

"A fool," cried a shrill gibing voice from somewhere beyond the circle. "No other."

I started convulsively; I had forgotten the girl's presence. So doubtless had the conspirators, for at the sound of her voice they turned quickly towards her; and, the ring of men opening out in the movement, she became visible to me. She stood, confronting us, her lips red, her face white as paper, her eyes glittering with a strange fierceness. Long afterwards she told me that the sound of my shrieks and cries ringing in her ears had been almost more than she could bear; that as scream followed scream

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she had driven the nails into her palms until her hands bled; and so only had been able to restrain herself, knowing well that if she would intervene to the purpose her time was not yet.

Now that it had come, nothing could exceed the mockery and scorn that were in her tone. "A fool," she cried, stridently, "has fetched it, and a fool will fasten it! And, whoever hangs, they will hang. And two of you at the back there will hang them. Why, you are fools, you are all fools, or you would take care that every man among you put his hand to the job, and was as deep as another! Or, if you like precedence, and it is a question of fastening—for the man who fetched the rope, he is as good as dead already—let the hand that wove the noose, tie it! Let that man tie it!" And with pitiless finger she pointed to the old plotter, who, sneaking and cringing in the background, had already his eye on the door and his mind on retreat. "Let him tie it!" she repeated.

"You slut!" he roared, his eyes squinting with fury. "Your tongue shall be slit. To your garret, vixen. Do you hear me?"

But the others, as was not unnatural, saw the matter in a different light. "By—, the wench is right!" cried Cassel; and Keyes said the same; and another backing him, there was a general chorus of "Ay, the girl is right! The girl is right!"

At that, the man who had brought the rope threw it down. "There's for me!" he said, gloomily, and with an ugly gleam in his eyes. "Let the old devil take it up. It is his job, not mine, and if I swing, he shall swing too."

"Fair!" cried all. "That is fair!" And, "That is fair, Mr. Ferguson," said Charnock. "Do you put the rope round his neck?"

"I?" Ferguson spluttered; glaring from under his wig.

"Yes, you!" the man who had brought the rope retorted with violence. "You! And why not, I'd like to know, my gentleman?"

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"I am no hangman!" cried the plotter, with a miserable assumption of dignity.

But the words and the evasion only inflamed the general rage. "And are we?" Cassel roared, with a volley of oaths. "You covenanting, psalm-singing, tub-thumping old scribbler!" he continued. "Do you think that we are here to do your dirty work, and squeeze throats at your bidding? *Peste!* For a gill of Hollands I would split your tongue for you. That and your pen have done too much harm already!"

"Peace!" Charnock said. "Peace! Go softly, man. And do you, Mr. Ferguson, take up the rope and do your part. Otherwise we shall have strange thoughts of you. There have been things said before, and it were well you gave no colour to them."

I cannot believe that even I, writhing in their hands, and screaming and begging for life, presented a more pitiable spectacle than Ferguson exhibited thus brought to book. All the base and craven instincts of a low and cowardly nature brought to the surface by the challenge, he quailed and cowered before the men; and, shifting his feet and breathing hard, glanced askance, first at one and then at another to see who would support him, or who could most easily be persuaded. But he found scant encouragement; the men, savage and ill-disposed to begin, and driven to the wall, had now conceived suspicions, and in proportion as delay and his conduct diverted their rage from me, they turned it on him with growing ferocity.

"Here is the cock of the pit!" cried Keyes, a trooper and a man of no education, who lacked even the occasional French word that betrayed the others' sojourn with King Louis. "D—— him! He would have us hang the man, but won't lay a finger on him himself! He is no Ketch, isn't he? Well, I hang no man either, unless I put a hand on *him*." And he pointed at the plotter.

A murmur of assent, stern and full of meaning, drove home the words.

"Mr. Ferguson," said Charnock, with grave

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politeness, "you hear what this gentleman says? And, if you ask me, he has reason. A few minutes ago you were forward with us to hang this person. And among gentlemen, to urge another to do what you will not do yourself lays you open to comment. It may even be pretended that if your rogue informed, you were not so ignorant of the fact as you would have us believe."

It was wonderful to see how the men, sore and desperate, caught at that notion; and with what greedy ferocity they turned on the knave who, only a few moments before, had swayed their passions to his will. It was to no purpose that Ferguson, head and hands shaking as with a palsy, strove frantically to hurl back the accusation. His wonted profanity seemed to fail him, while the violence which had daunted men of saner temperaments proved no match for Cassel's brutality. The latter, breaking in on him before he had stammered a score of words, called him liar and sneak, and was in the act to hound his comrades on him, when something caught the ear of one of them. With a cry of alarm this man, who stood near the door, raised his hand for silence.

Rage died down in the men's faces and involuntarily they clustered together. But hardly had the alarm been given and taken, or the lamp which hung against the wall been snatched down and shaded, before the sound of a key in the door reassured the conspirators. For me, who throughout the scene had leaned half swooning against the wall, listening, with what feelings the reader may judge, to the contest for my life—for me, who now stood reprieved, and for the moment safe, any change might be expected to be fraught with terror. But whether I had passed the bitterness of death, or had exhausted my capacity for suffering, it is certain that I awaited the event with lack-lustre eyes; and hearing a cry of, "It's Mat Smith! It is only Smith!" felt neither fear nor surprise. When Smith entered, followed by a woman, and with a quick glance took in the room and its occupants, I did not move.

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"Good," said Cassel with an oath of relief. "I thought that the soldiers were on us. But if they had been, curse me, but I would have sent this old Judas to his place before me!"

Smith looked with a grim smile from the speaker to Ferguson; and raising his eyebrows, "Judas?" said he, with ironical politeness. "Is it possible that you refer to my friend Mr. Ferguson?"

"Strangle your friend!" Cassel answered coarsely. "Do you know that his man there has blown on the thing and sold us?"

Smith's eye had already found me, where I learned against the wall, my hands tied. "I see," he said coolly. "I knew before that the game was up; and I have been somewhere, and warned someone"—this with a glance at Charnock, who nodded. "But I did not know how they had the office."

"He gave it! That is how they had the office!" Cassel retorted. "And it is my belief like man like master! I no more believe that that poor piece there would have dared to inform without his patron's leave than——"

He left the end of his sentence to be understood; but Charnock, taking up the tale and disregarding Ferguson's mutterings, described in a few words what had happened. When he came to the girl's intervention in my behalf, the woman who had entered with Smith, and who, though she seemed to be known to the conspirators, had hitherto remained fidgeting in the background, moved farther into the room. Approaching the girl, who was sitting moodily at a table by the fire, she touched her cheek with her fingers, and then on a sudden slipping her hand under her chin, turned up her face. The girl made no resistance, and the two women remained looking into one another's eyes while one might count twenty. Then the new comer, who was the same I had seen with Smith at the great lady's house in the outskirts, let the girl's face drop, with a little flirt of her fingers.

"Doris and Strephon, I see?" she said. And she sneered.

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CHAPTER XXIX

WHAT the girl answered I could not catch, for as she raised her head to reply, my ear caught the sound of rising danger. Ferguson was speaking. His words, no longer incoherent, a mere frothing of oaths and calling down of hideous fates on his head if he had ever betrayed, if he had ever sold, if he had deceived, ran in a steady current of wrathful denunciation. And the men listened; he had their ears again; he was no longer on his trial. I learned afterwards that while my attention was astray with the women, Smith, by stating what I had told him—namely, that the Secretary had used Ferguson as the intermediary through whom to warn Berwick—had confirmed the plotter's story, and at a stroke had restored his position. Whereon, full of spite, and desperately certain that, however exposed he lay on other sides, I at any rate could hang him, the wretched man had set himself anew to compass my destruction. Deterred neither by the check he had received nor by the gloomy looks of the conspirators, who responded but sluggishly to his appeal, he drove home again and again the one point on which he relied, the one point that was so dear to him that he could not understand their hesitation.

"Waste of time?" he cried. "We would be better employed looking to ourselves and slipping away to Romney, would we? But you are fools! You are babes! There is the evidence that can swear to you all! There is the evidence, and keen to do it! There is the evidence in your hands! And you will let him escape?"

"There is evidence without him," said King, sulkily. "Where is Prendergast?"

"He is honest."

"But where is he? And where is Porter?"

"Where is Sir John Fenwick, for that matter?" replied the man who had answered for Prendergast. "He is too high and mighty to mix with us, and will

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only eat the chestnut when we have got it clear of the fire. For that matter, where are Friend and Parkyns? They are not here."

"Pshaw!" Ferguson cried, in a rage at the digression. "Why will you be thinking of them? Cannot you see that they are tainted? They cannot if they will! And they are gentlemen to boot, and not dirty knaves like this fellow."

"For the matter of that," said Cassel, bluntly, "Preston was a lord. But he sold Ashton."

The words brought a kind of cold breath of suspicion into the room; at the chill touch of which each looked stealthily at his neighbour, as if he said, "Is it he? Or he?" On this, Ferguson, seeing that he made little progress, and that the men, though they looked at me vengefully, were not to be kindled, grew only the more furious, and began to storm and rage. But Charnock in a moment cut him short.

"Mr. Ferguson is so far right," said he, "that if we let this person go to perfect his evidence against us, we shall be foolish. That were to set a premium on treason."

"Then let Mr. Ferguson deal with him," Cassel answered, curtly. "He is his man, and it is his business. I don't lay a hand on him, and that is flat."

"Nor I! Nor I!" cried more than one with eagerness. God knows if in their hearts they thought to curry favour with me.

"You are all mad!" Ferguson cried, beating the air.

"And you are a coward!" Cassel retorted. "I'd as soon trust him as you. If you are taken you'll peach, Ferguson. God damn you! I know you will. You will peach! You are as white-livered a cur as ever lived!"

Then I thought that for certain the bitterness of death was past, and I took courage, discerning for the first time solid land beyond the deeps and black suffocating fears through which I had passed. For the first time since the men seized me I allowed

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my thoughts to dwell on the future, and myself to hope and plan. But the warm current of returning life had scarcely coursed through my veins and set my heart beating, before Charnock's voice, taking up the tale, smote on my ear, and in a moment dashed my jubilation.

There was that in his tone gripped my heart afresh.

"Peace, man," he said, addressing Cassel. "Is this a time to be bickering? Let us be clear what is to be done with this man. For my part, I am not for letting him go."

"Nor I," said Smith, speaking almost for the first time.

The others, lately so hot and impassioned, looked at the speakers and at one another with a sort of apathy. Only Ferguson cried violently, "Nor I, by —! Nor I. We are many, and what is one life?"

"Quite so, Mr. Ferguson," Charnock retorted. "But will you take the life?"

The plotter drew back as he had drawn back before. "It is everybody's business," he said.

"Then will you take part in it? You are the first to condemn. Will you be one to execute?"

Ferguson moistened his lips with his tongue, and, swallowing with an effort, looked at me and away again. The sweat stood on his face. For me, I watched him, fascinated; watched him, and still he did not answer.

"Just so," said Charnock, at last. "You will not. And that being so, is there anyone else who will? If not, what is to be done?"

"Put him in a lugger," Keyes cried, "at the bridge; and by morning——"

"He will be taken off at the Nore," Cassel answered scornfully. "And you too if you think to get off that way. There are more Billops in the pool than the Billop who gave up Ashton."

"Gag him and leave him here."

"And have him found by the messengers to-morrow morning?" Cassel answered. "As well and better,

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call a chair, and pay the chairman, and bid them take him to the Secretary's office with our compliments."

"Well, if not here—in one of the other kens. Ferguson knows plenty."

The woman who had come in with Smith laughed. "That might answer," she said, "if his sweetheart were not here. Do you think she would leave him to starve?"

There was a general stir as the men turned to the girl. "Pooh," said one, "it is Ferguson's girl."

"And your spy's sweetheart," the woman repeated.

The girl lifted her head and showed a face pale, weary, and dull-eyed. "He is nothing to me," she said.

And the men would have believed her. But the woman, with a swift, cat-like movement, seized her wrist and held it. "Nothing to you, my girl, isn't he?" she cried. "Then you have the fever or the small-pox on you! One, two, three——"

Her face flaming, the girl sprang up and snatched away her pulse.

The woman laughed. "He is nothing to you, is he?" she said in a mocking tone. "Yet what will you not give me to save him, my chick? What will you not give to see him safe out of this house? What——?"

"Peace, peace!" cried Charnock. "Time is everything, and we are wasting it. Unless we would be taken, every man of us must be half-way to Romney Marsh by morning."

"Will you leave him to me?" said Smith suddenly.

"Leave him?"

"Ay. Or, better, let me have two minutes' talk with him upstairs, and if he comes to my way of thinking, I will answer for him."

"Answer for him?" cried Ferguson, with a sneer. "If you answer for him no better than I did, you will give us small surety."

"Ay, but I am not you, Mr. Ferguson," Smith retorted, in a tone of such contempt that the older man writhed under it.

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"This person—Mr. Taylor or Mr. Price, or whatever his name is—knows me and that what I say I do."

"Well, do—what you like with him," Charnock answered peevishly, "so that you stop his mouth."

To my joy the other men assented in the same tone, being glad to be rid of the burden. It may seem strange that those who had been ready to take my life an hour before should now be as ready to let me go; but few are eager to take life in cold blood, and to kill a man as they would a sheep. Moreover, in favour of these men—on whose memory the Assassination Plot has cast obloquy not altogether deserved, since few of them were assassins in the strict sense, and the worst of all escaped his just fate—in their favour I say, it is to be observed that the fact which they designed, however horrid in the eyes of good citizens, and not to be defended by me, was not in their sight so much a murder as an act of warfare carried into the enemy's country. So fully, I am persuaded, was this the case, that had it been a question of stabbing the King in the back, or shooting him from a window, I believe not one would have volunteered. Let this stand to the credit of men whom I saw and have described at their worst—drunken, reckless, ill-combined, and worse governed; 'whose illegal design, had it succeeded, must have postponed the Protestant succession in these realms; but who, misguided and betrayed as they were by leaders more evil than themselves, evinced some spark of chivalry in their lives—since they risked all for a cause—and in their sufferings a fortitude that would have become better men and a nobler effort.

So much of them. One released my hands, and another at Smith's request found him a light; and my new protector bidding me follow him, and leading the way upstairs to the room at the back whence I had broken out, those we left were deep in whisperings of the Marsh, and Hunt's house, and Harrison's Inn at Dymchurch, before we were out of hearing.

Smith's first act, when we reached the upper room was to close the door. This done, he set his candle

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on the floor—whence its flame threw dark wavering outlines of our figures on the ceiling—and moved to the hearth. Here, while I stared, wondering at his silence, he searched for a spring, and finding it, caused a large piece of the wainscot to fall out and reveal a cavity about three feet deep and six long. He beckoned to me to bring the candle and look in, and supposing it to be a secret way out, I did so. But outlet there was none. The place was nothing more than a concealed cupboard.

"Well?" he said, when he had moved the candle to and fro that I might see the better—his face wearing a smile that caught and held my gaze. "Well? What do you think of it, Mr. Taylor?"

I did not understand him, and I said so, trembling.

"It is a tolerable hiding-place?" said he.

I nodded; to please him I would have said it was a palace.

"And not a bad prison?"

I nodded again; staring at him, fascinated. I began to understand.

"And a grave?"

I shuddered. "What do you mean?" I muttered.

"Lay a man there, bound hand and foot and gagged; what would you find in a year's time, Mr. Price? Not much."

I stared at him.

"If they knew of that downstairs," he continued, stopping to snuff the candle with his fingers, then smiling at me, "would they use it, I wonder? Would they use it? What do you think, Mr. Price?"

I made no answer.

"Shall I tell them?" said he.

"What—what do you want?" I whispered hoarsely.

"That is better," said he, nodding. "To be candid, almost nothing. Two pledges. First, that you will give no evidence against anyone here. That of course."

I muttered assent. I was ready to promise anything.

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"And secondly, that you will, when I call upon you, do me a little favour, Mr. Price. It is a small matter, a trifle I asked you at my lady's house three days back. Promise to do that, as and when I demand performance, and in ten minutes from this time you shall leave this house safe, free, and unhurt."

"I promise," I said eagerly. "I promise honestly!"

But even while I spoke, I thought it the strangest of all the things that had happened to me that night, that this man should think it worth while to pledge me or value at a groat a promise so given. For the pledge was a pledge to do ill; and as soon as he and the other conspirators were laid by the heels or had fled the country, what sanction remained to bind me? I saw that even as I spoke, and I promised—and promised. And would have promised fifty times—with the reservation that I did so under *force majeure*. Who would not have done the same, being in my place?

But I supposed I answered too quickly, and so he read my thoughts; or he had it in his mind from the first to read me a lesson. For the words were scarcely out of my mouth before he slid his hand into his breast with the ugliest smile I ever saw on a man's face; and he signed to me to get into the cupboard. "Get in," he said, between his closed teeth; and then, when, terrified by the change and the order, I began to back from it, "Get in!" he said, in a voice that set me shaking; "or take the consequences. Do you hear me? I am no Ferguson, to threaten and no more."

I dared resist no longer, and I crawled in trembling and praying him not to shut me in—not to shut me in.

"Lie down!" he said, gloating on me with cruel eyes, and his hand still in his breast.

I lay down, praying for mercy.

"On your back! On your back!" he continued. "And your hands by your sides. So! That is better. Now listen to me, Mr. Price, and think on what I say. When you want to be laid out for good

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as you are laid out now, when you are ready for your coffin and shroud—and the worms—then break your promise to me, for coffin and shroud and worms will be ready. Think of that—think of that, and of me when the temptation comes. And hark you,” he went on, fixing his eyes on mine, “you count on it that I shall be taken with the others, or escaping shall be where you need not fear me? Don’t deceive yourself. If a week hence I am in prison, take that for a sign, and please yourself. But if I am free, obey, obey—or God help you!”

I know not how to describe with an approach to fidelity the effect which words, apparently so simple, had on me; or the terror, out of all proportion to the means chosen—for he spoke without oath, violence or passion—into which they threw me, and which was very far from passing with the sound. I had feared Ferguson, but I feared this man a hundred times more! And yet I can give no reason, save that he spoke quietly, and so seemed to mean all and something beyond what he said. The plans for deceiving him, which I had entertained a moment before, melted into thinnest air while I lay and sweated in my narrow berth, not daring to move eye or limb until he gave me leave. And he, as if he knew how fear of him grew on me under his gaze—or in sheer cruelty, I know not which—kept me there, and sat smiling and smiling at me, as the devil may smile at some dead man passed beyond redemption; kept me there God knows how long. But so long, and to such purpose, that when he bade me rise, and looking closely into my face, nodded, and told me I might go—nay, later than that, when he had led me downstairs and opened the door for me, and supported me through it—for in the cold air I staggered like a drunken man—even then, I say, so heavy was the spell of fear laid on me, and such his power, I dared not move or stir until he had twice—smiling the second time—bidden me go. “Go, man,” said he; “you are free. But remember!”

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CHAPTER XXX

FEW men are condemned to such an ordeal as that through which I had passed; and though some who read this, and are as remote from death as the wife, that may be any day, and must be one day, is remote from the young bachelor—though some, I say, and in particular those who never drew blade in anger in their lives, but have done all their fighting in the cockpit, may think that I carried it poorly, and with none of the front and bravado suitable to the occasion, I would have them remember the old saying, *Sutor ne supra crepidam*, and ask of a scholar only a scholar's work. I would have them remember that in the shadow of the scaffold, even a man so gallant by repute as the Lord Preston of that day, stooped to be an evidence; and that in the same situation the family pride of Richard Hampden availed as little as the reckless courage of Monmouth or the effrontery of Sir John Fenwick.

Simpliciter, it is one thing to vapour at the Cocoa-tree among wits and beaux, and another to take the hazard when the time comes; as no less a person than my Lord Bolingbroke discovered, and that no farther back than '14. I would have large talkers to remember this. For myself I am content that I came through the trial with my life; and yet, not with so much of that either, that anything surer than instinct guided my steps thence to the duke's home in St. James's Square; where arriving, speechless and helpless, it was wonderful I was not put to the door. Fortunately, my lord, marvelling at my long absence, and mindful, even in the turmoil of that evening, of the service I had done him, had given orders in my behalf. I was recognised, half dead as I was, and taken to the steward's room, and being let blood by a surgeon who was called in, was put to bed; all who saw me supposing that I was suffering from vertigo, or from some injury, though no marks of blows could be discovered.

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That was a night long remembered in London. Messengers, attended by files of soldiers carrying torches, were every hour passing through the streets, searching houses and arresting the suspected. From mouth to mouth rumours of the conspiracy flew abroad; at nine o'clock it was current that the King was wounded; at ten that he had been seized; at midnight that he was dead. Early in the evening the drawbridge at the Tower was drawn up, and the sentries were doubled; the City gates were closed and guarded; a battalion stood all night under arms at Kensington; the Council was in perpetual sitting; many houses were lighted from eve to dawn. Nor since the great panic of Beachy Head in '90 had London known any alarm so deep or widespread.

If this was so in the City, at the Secretary's residence, whither many of the prisoners were brought for examination as soon as they were taken, the excitement rose to its height. St. James's Square, then unenclosed, was occupied all night by successive groups of sight-seers, or by persons more nearly interested in the event. One consequence of this was that, with this stir without, my case attracted the less notice within; and unheeded and almost forgotten, I was left in peace to sleep off the shock and fright I had experienced; of which the severity may be gauged by the fact that the afternoon of the next day was well advanced before I awoke, and finding myself in bed in a strange room, with cold broth and a little wine standing within reach, I sat up, and looked round me in amazement. The steep slope of the ceiling towards the window, and the heavy flattened eaves which projected over the panes, apprised me that I lay under the leads of a great house; but this was the extent of my knowledge. However, my stomach presently called for food, and I took it; and my head ceasing to swim, I began to recall what had happened to me; then rising, and going to the window, I recognised the great and fashionable square on which my window looked. At that, and the thoughts of what I had gone through,

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and the danger I had escaped, I fell to quaking again and for a moment the dizziness returned. But presently, the cheerful aspect of the room much aiding me, I recovered myself, and dressing, and finishing the food, I prepared to descend.

No need to say that I wondered much at all I saw, and particularly at the handsome proportions of the staircase; which I descended without seeing any person until I reached the landing on the first floor. Here, looking timidly over the balustrade, I discovered that the buzz and hum of voices which I had heard as soon as I opened my door came from the hall, which appeared to be paved with heads. First and nearest to where I stood a number of persons whom I took to be servants were clustered on the lowest steps of the staircase. There, standing as if in the boxes of a theatre, they were taken up with staring at what went on on the floor below; their attention being particularly taken up with a row of eight or nine men, who, seated on chairs along one side of the hall, seemed to be in the charge of a messenger and some tipstaves. These were evidently prisoners awaiting examination. Between them and the stairs occupying the floor of the hall, and both moving and standing still, was a crowd of persons of condition, the greater part, to all appearance, clients of the duke, or officers and persons who, having the *entree*, had stepped in to see the sight.

I had no eyes, however, for these; for with a beating heart I recognised among the dejected prisoners seated along the wall, four whom I knew—King, Keyes, Cassel, and Ferguson himself; and I had anything but a mind to stay to be recognised in my turn. I was in the act of withdrawing, therefore, as quietly as I could, when I saw with a kind of shock that the prisoner at the end of the row—the one nearest to me and farthest from the door—was a girl. It needed no second glance to tell me that the girl was Mary. The light at that inner extremity of the hall was waning, and her face, always pale and now in shadow, wore an aspect of

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grey depression that, natural as it was under the circumstances, went to my heart; and impressed me deeply in proportion as I had always found her hard and self-reliant. But moved as I was, I dared not linger; since to linger might be to be observed. With a light foot, therefore, I carried out my first intention, and, drawing back undiscovered, sneaked up the staircase to my room.

My clue in the circumstances was clear. Plainly it was to lie close and shun observation until the crisis was passed; then by every means in my power—saving always the becoming an evidence in court, which was too dangerous—to deserve the duke's favour; and as to the pledge I had given to Smith, to be guided by the future.

Such a line of conduct was immensely favoured by the illness to which I had so fortunately succumbed. Once back in my bed, I had only to lie there and affect weakness. In a day or two I might hope that things would be so far advanced that my share in them and knowledge of them would go for little; and I, on the ground of the personal favour I had done his Grace, might keep his favour—yet run no risk.

In fact, nothing could seem more simple than such a line of conduct; on which—the western daylight that still lingered in the room, giving my retreat a most cheerful aspect—I felt that I had every reason to hug myself. After the miseries and dangers of the past week I was indeed well off. Here, in the remote top floor of my lord's great house in the square, I was as safe as I could be anywhere in the world. And I knew it.

But so contrary is human nature, and so little subject to the dictations of the soundest sense, that I had not lain in my bed five minutes, congratulating myself on my safety, before the girl, and the wretchedness I had read in her face, began to trouble me. It was not to be denied that she had gone some way towards saving my life—if she had not actually saved it; and I had a kind of feeling for her on that

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account. True, things were greatly altered since we had agreed to go to Romford together, *et nuptias facere*. I had got no patron then, nor such prospects as I now had, these troubles once overpast. But for all that, it troubled me to think of her as I had seen her, pale and downcast; and by and bye I found myself again at the door of my room with my hand on the latch. Thence I went back, shivering and ashamed, and calling myself a fool; and tried, by watching the crowd in the square—but timidly, since even at that height I fancied I might be recognised—to divert my thoughts, with so little success in the end, however, that presently I was stealing down the stairs.

I knew that it was impossible I could pass down the main staircase and through the servants without being observed. But I took it that in such a house there must be a back stair; and coming to the first floor I turned along the main corridor leading into the heart of the house, and pretty quickly found that staircase—which was as good as dark—and crept down it, still meeting no one; a thing that surprised me until I stood in the long passage on the ground floor corresponding with the corridor above, and found that the door, which from its position should cut it off from the front hall, was locked. Tantalised by the murmur of voices in the hall, and my proximity, I tried the lock twice; but the second effort only confirming the result of the first, I was letting down the latch as softly as I could, hoping that I should not be detected, when on a sudden the door was flung in my face, all the noise and heat of the hall burst on me, and in the opening appeared a stout flushed man, who glared at me as if he would eat me.

“What are you doing here?” he cried, “when twice I have told you——” Then he stopped, seeing who it was, and “Hallo!” he continued in a different and more civil tone, “it is you, is it? Are you better?”

Afterwards I learned that this was Mr. Martin

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my lord's house-steward, but at the time I knew him only for some one in authority; and I muttered an excuse. "Well, come through, now you are here," he continued sharply. "But the orders are strict that this door be kept locked while this business is going. You can see as well, or better, from the stairs. There, those are the men. And a rare set of Frenchified devils they look! Charnock is with my lord now, and I hope he may not blow him up with gunpowder or some popish trick."

He had scarcely told me this when a stir in the body of the hall announced a new arrival. Immediately a cry was raised of "Room for my Lord Marlborough! Room for my Lord Godolphin!" and the press falling to either side out of respect, I had a glimpse of two gentlemen in the act of entering; one, a stout and very noble-looking man of florid complexion, the other stout also and personable, but a trifle smug and solemn. The steward had no sooner heard their names than in a great fluster he bade me keep the door; and pushing himself into the throng, he went with immense importance to receive them.

So by a strange piece of luck at the moment that the check of his presence was withdrawn, I found myself standing within three feet of the girl, whose seat was close to the door. Moreover, the movement, by thrusting those who had before occupied the floor back upon the line of prisoners, had walled us in, as it were, from observation. Under these circumstances our eyes met; and I looked for a flush of joy and surprise, a cry of recognition at least. But though Mary started, and for an instant stared at me wide-eyed, her gaze fell the next moment, and, muttering something inaudible, she let her chin sink on her breast.

I did not remember that, supposing I had informed, and ignorant of the scene which had bound me to the Duke of Shrewsbury, she would see nothing surprising in my presence in his house; and more deeply wounded by her demeanour than I can now believe possible, I bent over her.

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"Don't you know me?" I whispered. "Mary!"

She shivered, but retained the same attitude, her eyes on the floor.

"Can I do anything for you?" I persisted. But this time I spoke more coldly; her silence began to annoy me.

She looked up then with a wan smile; and, with lips so dry that they scarcely performed their office, spoke. "You can let me escape," she muttered.

"That is impossible," I answered promptly—to put an end to such notions. And then to comfort her, "Besides, what can they do to you?" I continued. "Nothing! You are not a man; and they do not burn women for treason now—unless it is for coining. Cheer up! They——"

"They will send me to the Compter—and whip me," she muttered, shuddering so suddenly and violently that the chair creaked under her. And then, "If you can get me away," she continued, moistening her lips and speaking with her eyes averted—"well! But if not you had better leave me. You do me no good," she added, after a slight pause, and with a sob of impatience in her voice.

I knew that it was not unlikely that the House of Correction would be her fate; a fate that, even to a decent woman—and she was a girl!—might be less tolerable than death. And I felt something of the horror that parched her mouth and strained her eyes. The hall was growing dark about us, and, the throng of persons of all sorts who filled it poisoning the air with their breathing and the odour of their clothes, I experienced an astonishing loathing of the confinement and the place. I saw this—the beginning of the dreary road which she had to travel; and my heart revolting with the pity of it, I fell into a passion and did a thing I very seldom did. I swore.

But then—Heaven knows how I went on to the thing I did next; a thing so unwise and reckless, and in every way unlike me! Certainly it was not the mere opportunity tempted me—though a chance

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more favourable, the general attention being engrossed by the two noblemen, could not have been conceived; yet it was not that, I say, for what I did, I did on the impulse of the moment, in sheer blind terror, not looking to see whether I were watched or not. Nor did the impulse arise from any further suggestion on the girl's part. In fact, all I remember of it is that, in a paroxysm of pity, feeling rather than seeing that the people round us hid us, I touched the girl's shoulder, and that she looked up with a wild look in her eyes—and that that determined me. So that without more I unlocked the door in a trembling, fumbling sort of manner, and passed her through it, and followed her; no one except Cassel, the prisoner who sat next her, being the wiser. Had I been prudent, or acted under anything but the impulse of the moment, I should have let her go through, and trusting to her woman's wits to get her clear of the house, have remained on guard myself as if nothing had happened. And certainly this would have been the safer way, since I could have sworn, when challenged, that no one had passed through the door. But I had not the nerve to think of this or remain; and I went with her.

The thing once done, my first thought, and the natural, if foolish, impulse on which I acted, was to take her to my room; hers to follow where I led. The passage beyond the door was dark, but, taking no thought of slip or stumble, in a moment I had her up the small staircase which led to the first floor, and through the door at the head of the flight into the long corridor, which, spacious, lofty, and comparatively light—in every way unlike the crowded hall below—ran from the well of the great staircase into the depths of the house. By involving her in this upper part, whence escape was impossible, and where prolonged search must inevitably discover her, I was really doing a foolish thing. But in the event it mattered nothing; for as we reached the corridor, and paused to cast a weary glance this way and that—I, for my part, shaking like an aspen, and I

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doubt not as white as a sheet—one footstep rang on the marble floor that edged the matting of the passage, and the next moment the duke himself, who had issued from a doorway no more than five paces away, came plump upon us.

The surprise was so complete that we had no time to move; and we stood as if turned to stone. Yet even then, if I had retained perfect presence of mind, and bethought me that he might not know the girl, and would deem her one of his household—a still-room maid or a seamstress—all might have been well; for though he did, in fact, know the girl, having questioned her not half an hour before, it was on me that his eye alighted; and his first words were proof that he neither saw nor suspected anything.

“Are you better?” he said, pausing with the kindness and consideration that so well became him—nay, that became no other man so well. “I am glad to see that you are about again. We shall want you presently. What was it?”

And then, if I had answered him at once, I have no doubt that he would have passed on; but my teeth chattered so pitiably that I could only gape at him; and on that, seeing that something was wrong, he looked at my companion, and recognised her. I saw his eyes grow wide with astonishment, and his mouth grow stern. Then, “But what—what, sir, is this?” he exclaimed. “And what do you——”

He said no more, for as he reached that word the door beside me opened gently; a man slid round it, looked, saw the duke, and stood, a stifled oath on his lips. It was Cassel, his hands shackled.

At this fresh appearance the duke’s astonishment may be imagined, and could scarcely be exceeded. He stared at the door as if he questioned who still remained behind it, or who might be the next to issue from it. But then, seeing, I suppose, something whimsical and bizarre in the situation—which there certainly was, though at the time I was far from discerning it—and being a man who, in all circumstances, retained a natural dignity, he allowed his

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features to relax into a smile; and, recovering himself before anyone of us, took a tone between the grave and ironical. "Mr. Cassel?" he said. "Unless I mistake, the gentleman I saw a few minutes ago?"

"The same," the conspirator answered jauntily; but his anxious eyes, roving beside and behind the duke, belied his tone.

"Then, perhaps," my lord answered, taking out his snuff-box, and tapping it with a good-humoured air, "you will see, sir, that your presence here needs explanation? May I ask how you came here?"

"The devil I know or care, your Grace!" Cassel answered frankly. "Except that I came into your house with no good will, and could I have found the door should not have outstayed my welcome."

"I believe it," my lord said drily, "if I believe nothing else. But you have lost the throw. And that being so, may I beg that you will descend again? I am loth to use force in my own house, Mr. Cassel, and to call the servants would prejudice your case. If you are wise, therefore, I think that you will see the wisdom of returning."

"Have no fear," the man answered with sufficient coolness. "I should not have come up, but that I saw Square-toes there smuggle out the girl; and as no one was looking it seemed natural to follow."

"Oh!" said the duke, flashing a glance at me that loosened my knee-joints. "He smuggled her out, did he?"

"What could he do?" the conspirator answered. "She saved his life yesterday."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, did she, when Ferguson would have hung him like a dog! And not far wrong either! But mum! I am talking. And, save her or no, I did not think the creature had the spunk to do the thing. No, I did not."

"No?" said my lord, looking at him attentively.

"No; and as for the wench, your Grace——" and with the word Cassel dropped his voice, "she is no more than a child. You have enough. It is all

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over. The game is played out. *Sacré nom de Dieu*, let her go, my lord! Let the girl go."

The duke raised his eyebrows, as if he did not quite follow the train of the other's thoughts. "I see no girl," he said. "Of whom are you talking, Mr. Cassel?"

I do not know who was more astonished at that, Cassel or I. True, the girl was gone. A moment before, the duke's back being half turned to her, she had slipped into a doorway a couple of paces away, and there I could even now hear her breathing; but that my lord had failed to detect the movement I could no more believe than that he had failed to see the girl two minutes earlier, when, as clearly as I ever saw anything in my life, I had seen him examine her features.

Nevertheless, "I see no girl," he repeated coolly. "But I see you, Mr. Cassel; and as the alarm may be given at any moment, and I do not choose to be found with you, I must beg of you to descend at once. Do you, sir," he continued, addressing me sharply, "go with him, and when you have taken him back to the hall bring me the key of the door."

"Well, I am d——d!" said Cassel.

For the first time the duke betrayed signs of anger. "Go, sir," he said. "And do you"—this to me—"bring me the key of that door."

Cassel turned as if to go; then with difficulty lifting his hands to his head he took off his hat. "My lord," he said, "you are well called the King of Hearts. For a Whig you are a d——d good fellow!"

CHAPTER XXXI

WHAT was preparing, or what my lord intended by conduct so extraordinary, I had not then the time to consider. True I got Cassel into the hall again undetected—which was of itself a marvel; but when it came to taking the key from the lock my hand shook so violently with fear and excitement that at

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the first attempt I failed. Before I succeeded the steward bustled up through the crowd, and seeing what I was about, ordered me with some roughness to desist.

"Do you want an escape that way?" said he, bursting with importance. "Leave it to me. Here, hands off, man." And he drew me into the hall and locked the door.

So there I was, fixed as it were in the girl's empty place, with Cassel grinning at me on one side and the steward grumbling on the other, and the curious throng so thick about us that it was impossible for me to budge an inch. It amazed me that the girl's absence had not yet been observed; but I knew that in no short time it must be, and my misery was in proportion. Presently the moment came. "Hallo!" cried the steward, peeping first on one side of me and then on the other. "Where is that slut that was here?"

"In with your master," said Cassel coolly.

"But Charnock is with him."

"Well, I suppose he can have two at a time if he pleases, Mr. Pudding-head! Thousand devils! Are we going to be kept in this crowd all night?"

The steward sniffed his indignation, but the answer satisfied him for the time; and the messengers and tipstaves, being engaged at the farther end of the hall in shepherding their prisoners on the side of the house door—and being crowded upon besides by gentlemen whom they feared to offend—had no notion of what had happened or that their tale was not complete. Someone had lighted a round lanthorn that hung in the middle of the hall; but the light hanging low, and being intercepted by the heads of those before us, barely reached the corner in which I stood. Still I knew that this was but a respite; and my relief and joy were great when a cry of "Price! Price!" was raised; and "Price! Who is he? His Grace wants Price!" passing from lip to lip, the steward thrust me forward and called to the nearest to make a way for me. This being done

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I was speedily passed through the crowd to a door at the farther side of the hall, where, having satisfied two servants who stood on guard there that I was the man, I was admitted.

I was not yet out of the wood. I had good reason to doubt what the duke might have to say to me. But at least I had escaped from the steward, whom I had begun to regard with a mixture of fear and hatred; and I prepared to face the ordeal before me with a courage that now seems astonishing. However, for the moment my hardihood was not to be proved. The room in which I found myself was large and lofty, lined for the most part with books, and adorned with marble busts that gleamed ghostly in the corners, or stood out bright and white where the radiance of the candles fell upon them. In the middle of the dark-hued carpet that covered the floor stood a table, littered with papers, pens, and books; and this, with three ordered chairs, set along the farther side of it, had a formidable air. But the three persons for whose accommodation the chairs were placed were all on their feet, standing in a group before the hearth; and so deeply engrossed in the subject under discussion that, if they were aware of my entrance, they took no heed of it.

The Earl of Marlborough, the more handsome and courtly of the two noblemen whom I had seen go through the hall—a man even then of a great and splendid presence and address, though not what he afterwards became, was speaking, when, finding myself unheeded, I gathered my wits to listen. "I have no right to give advice, your Grace," he said, in suave and courtly accents; "but I think that you will be ill-advised if you pay much attention to what these rogues allege—or make it public."

"No man will be safe!" urged his companion. I thought I detected a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Better hang them out of hand," responded the earl blandly. And he took snuff and delicately dusted his upper lip.

"Yet I do not know," answered the duke, who

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stood between the two with his eyes on the fire and his back towards me. "If we go too fast—people may say, my lord, that we fear what they may disclose."

The earl laughed. "You had little gain by Preston," said he, "and you kept him long enough."

"My Lord Devonshire is anxious to go into the matter thoroughly."

"Doubtless he has his reasons," Lord Marlborough answered, shrugging his shoulders. "The question is—whether your Grace has the same."

"I know none why we should *not* go into it," the duke answered in measured tones which showed pretty clearly that in spite of his good-nature he was not to be led blindfold. "They can have nothing to say that will reflect on me. And I am sure," he continued, slightly inclining his head in courteous fashion, "that the same may be said of Lord Marlborough."

"*Cela va sans dire!*" answered the earl, in a voice so unconstrained and with a gesture so easy that if he lied—as some have been found to assert—he showed a mastery of that art alike amazing and incredible. "And of Lord Godolphin also."

"By God, yes!" that peer exclaimed, in such a hurry to assent that his words tumbled over one another.

"Just so. I say so, my lord," the earl repeated, with a faint ring of scorn in his tone; while Lord Godolphin wiped his forehead. "But innocence is no shield against calumny, and if these rogues can prolong their lives by a lie, do you think that they will not tell one? Or ten?"

"Ay, by God!" cried Godolphin. "Or twenty, I'll lay long odds to that."

My lord bowed, and admitted that it was possible.

"So possible," Lord Marlborough continued, lightly and pleasantly, "that it is not long since your Grace, unless I am mistaken, suffered after that very fashion. I have no mind to probe your secrets, duke—God forbid! I leave such tasks to my Lord Portland!"

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But, unless I am in error, when you last left office advantage was taken of some"—he paused, raising his shoulders, and then with an easy motion of his white hands—"some trifling indiscretion. It was exaggerated and increased tenfold; and placed in a light so false that"—he paused again to take a pinch of snuff from his box—"that for a time even the King was induced to believe—that my Lord Shrewsbury was corresponding with France. An idea very amusing!"

The duke did not answer for a moment; then in a voice that shook a little, "It is an age of false witnesses," he said.

"Precisely," Lord Marlborough answered, shrugging his shoulders with charming *bonhomie*. "That is what I say. They do not greatly hurt you or me. We have clear consciences and clean hands; and can defy these ruffians. But the party should be considered."

"There is something in that," said the duke, nodding and speaking in his natural tone.

"And smaller men, as innocent but more vulnerable—they too should be considered."

"True," said Lord Godolphin, nodding. "True, by God!"

The duke assented thoughtfully. "I will bear it in mind," he said. "I think, myself, it is a questionable policy."

"In any event I am sure that your Grace's prudence will steer the matter to a safe issue," Lord Marlborough answered, speaking in his courtliest fashion. "I thank Heaven that you hold the seals, and not Portland or Auverquerque, who see in every Englishman a foe to the King."

"I should be sorry to see any but an Englishman in the Secretary's office," the duke said, with a little heat.

"And yet—that is what we have to expect," Lord Marlborough answered placidly. "But we are detaining your Grace. Come, my lord, we must be going. I suppose that Sir John is not taken?"

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"Sir John Fenwick?"

"Yes."

"It has not been reported."

With that the two noblemen took a formal farewell; and the duke begging them to go out by his private door that they might avoid the press in the hall, they were crossing the room in that direction when a sudden hubbub arose outside and a murmur of alarm. Before they had done more than raise their eyebrows, asking one another politely what it meant, the door beside which I stood was opened, and a gentleman came in. He looked with a flustered face at the duke. "Your Grace's pardon," he said hurriedly. "One of the prisoners has escaped!"

"Escaped!" said the duke. "Impossible! How?"

"The woman has somehow slipped away. Through the crowd it is believed, your Grace. The messenger——"

But at that moment the unfortunate official appeared himself in the doorway, looking scared out of his life. "What is this?" said the duke sharply.

The man whimpered. "'Fore God it is not my fault," he cried. "She never passed through the door! May I die if she did, your Grace."

"She may be still in the hall?"

"We have searched it through and through!" the man answered desperately. "It remains only to search the house, your Grace—with your permission."

"What!" the duke cried, really or apparently startled. "Why the house?"

"She must have slipped into the house, for she never went out!" the man answered doggedly. "She never went out!"

The duke shrugged his shoulders and turned to Lord Marlborough. "What do you think?" said he.

The earl raised his eyebrows. By this time half the concourse in the hall had pressed to the doorway, and were staring into the room. "Call Martin," said the duke. "And stand back a little, if you please," he continued haughtily. "This is no public court, but my house, good people."

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It seemed to me—but I, behind the door, was in a boundless fright—that the steward would never come. He did come at last, and, pushing his way through the crowd, presented himself with a bustling confidence that failed to hide his apprehensions. Nor was the duke's reception of him calculated to set him at his ease.

"Stand out, man!" he said harshly, and with a nearer approach to the tyrannical than I had hitherto seen in a man who was the best-natured of his species. "Stand out and answer me, and no evasions. Did I not give you an order of the strictest character to lock the inner door and leave it for nothing and no one—while this business was forward?"

Martin gasped. "May it please your Grace," he said, "I——"

"Answer, fool, what I ask," the duke cried, cutting him short with the utmost asperity. "Did I not give you those orders?"

The man was astonished, and well-nigh terrified. "Yes," he said. "It is true, your Grace."

"And did you obey them?"

Poor Martin saw with astonishment that all the trouble was like to rest on his back, and answered as in all probability the duke expected. "I did, your Grace," he said roundly. "I have not been an arm's length from the door, nor has it been unlocked. I have the key here," he continued, producing it and holding it up.

"Has anyone passed through the door while you have been on guard?"

The steward had gone too far to confess the truth now, and swore positively and repeatedly that no one had passed through the door or could have passed through the door; that it was impossible; that the door had been locked all the time, and the key in his possession; finally, that if the girl had gone through the door she must have gone through the keyhole, and was a witch. At which some present crossed themselves.

"I am satisfied," said the duke, addressing the

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messenger. "Doubtless she slipped through the crowd. But as you are responsible and will have to answer for the girl, I would advise you to lose no time in searching such of Mr. Ferguson's haunts as are known to you. It is probable that she will take refuge in one or other of them. For my part I will report the matter as favourably as I can to the Council. You can go. Lodge the others according to the warrants, and make no second blunder. See these people out, Martin. And for you, my lords, I am sorry that this matter has detained you."

"*La fille—ne valait pas beaucoup ?*" said the earl curiously.

"*Pas du tout !*" my lord answered, and, smiling, shrugged his shoulders. "*Rien !*"

CHAPTER XXXII

WITH the least inclination towards merriment I must have laughed at the face of horror with which Mr. Martin, when he went a few minutes later to expel the last stragglers, discovered me where I stood, trying to efface myself behind the door. He dared not speak, for the duke was standing at the table a few paces from him; and I would not budge. Fortunately I remembered that a still tongue was all he need wish; and I laid my finger on my lips and nodded to him. This a little encouraged him, but not much; and, in his fear of what I might let out if I were left alone with his master, he was still hesitating in two minds whether he should eject me or not, when the duke spoke.

"Is Price there?" he said, with his face averted and his hands busy with the papers. "The man I sent for just now."

"Yes, your Grace," Martin answered, making hideous faces at me.

"Then leave us. Shut the door."

If my lord had spoken the moment that was done and we were alone, I think it would have relieved me.

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But he continued to search among the papers on the table, and left me to sink under the weight of the stately room with its ordered rows of books, its ticking dial, and the mute busts of the great dead. The duke's cloak lay across a chair, his embroidered star glittering on the breast; his sword and dispatch-box were on another chair; and a thing that I took to be the signet gleamed among the papers on the table. From the lofty mantelpiece of veined marble, that, supported by huge rampant dogs, towered high above me (the work as I learned afterwards of the great Inigo Jones) the portrait of a man in armour, with a warder in his mailed hand, frowned down on me; and the stillness continuing unbroken, and all the things I saw speaking to me gravely and weightily of a world hitherto unknown—a world wherein the foot exchanged the thick pile of carpets for the sounding tread of Parian, and orders were obeyed unspoken, and sable-vested servants went to and fro at a sign—a world of old traditions, old observances, and old customs revolving round this man still young—I felt my spirits sink; the distance was so great from the sphere I had known. Every moment the silence grew more oppressive, the ticking of the clock more monotonous; it was an immense relief to me when the duke suddenly spoke, and addressing me in his ordinary tone, "You can write?" said he.

"Yes, your Grace."

"Then sit here," he replied, indicating a seat at the end of the table, "and write what I shall tell you."

And before I could marvel at the ease of the transition I was seated, quietly writing; what, I can no longer remember, for it was only the first of many hundred papers, of private and public importance, which I was privileged to write for his signature. My hand shook, and it is unlikely that I exhibited much of the natural capacity for such work which it has been my lot to manifest since; nevertheless, his Grace, after glancing over it, was pleased to express his satisfaction. "You learned to do this with Brome?" said he.

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"Yes, your Grace."

"Then now," he continued, seating himself—I had risen respectfully—"tell me what happened to you yesterday."

I had no choice but to obey; but before I told my story, seeing that he was so favourably inclined to me, I spoke out what was in my mind; and in the most moving terms I conjured him to promise me that I should not be forced to be an evidence. I would tell him all, I would be faithful and true to him, and ask nothing better than to be his servant; but be an informer in court I dared not.

"You dare not?" he said, with an odd look at me. "And why not, man?"

But all I could answer was, "I dare not! I am afraid, your Grace."

"What? Afraid of these villains?" he continued, impatiently. "I tell you, we have them; it is they who have to fear!"

But I still clung to my point. I would tell, but I would give no evidence; I dared not.

"I am afraid, Mr. Price," he said at last, "that you are something of a coward!"

I answered, grovelling before him, that it might be—it might be; but—

"But—who of us is not?" he answered, checking himself with a gesture between scorn and self-reproof.

"Do you mean that, man?" And he fixed his eyes on me as if he would read my mind. "Well, it is true. Who of us is not?" he repeated slowly; and turning from me he began to pace the room, his hands clasped behind him, so that before he had made a single turn it was easy to see that he had forgotten my presence. "Who of us is not afraid—if not of these scoundrels, then of the future, of the return, of *Jacobus iracundus et ingens*, of another 29th of May? To be safe now and to be safe then—who is not thinking of that, and living for that, and planning for that?"

He was silent awhile; then, with something of anger in his voice, "My Lord Marlborough, dipped to the lips in '88, who shall say that, for all that, he

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has not made his peace? And has good reason to urge us to let sleeping dogs lie? And Godolphin? Is it only at Newmarket he has hedged—that he says the less we go into this the better? And Sunderland, who trusts no one and whom no one trusts? And Leeds—all things for power? And Clarendon, once pardoned? And Russell, all temper? Who knows what pledges they have given, or are giving, or may give? Devonshire—Devonshire only has to lose, and stands to lose with me. With me!”

He seemed as he spoke thus to be so human, and through the robe of state and stateliness in which he lived the beating of the poor human heart was so plainly visible, that my heart went out to him; and with an eagerness and boldness that now surprise me, I spoke to him.

“But, your Grace,” I said, “while the King lives all is well. And were anything to happen to him——”

“Yes?” said he, staring at me; and no little astonished at the interruption.

“There is the Princess Anne. She is here, she would succeed, and——”

“And my Lord Marlborough with her!” said he, smiling. “Well, it may be. But who taught you politics, Mr. Price?”

“Mr. Brome,” said I, abashed. “What I know, your Grace.”

“Ha! I keep forgetting,” he answered gaily, “that I am talking to one of the makers of opinion—the formers of taste. But there, you shall be no evidence, I give you my word. So tell me all you know, and what befell you yesterday.”

I had no desire but to do so—on those terms, and one small matter excepted; and not only to do that, but all things that could serve him. Nevertheless, and though I had high hopes of what I might get by his grace and favour, I was far from understanding that this was the beginning of twenty years of faithful labour at his side; of a matter of fifteen thousand papers written under his eye; of whole ledgers made up, of estate-accompts balanced and tallies collected;

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of many winters and summers spent among his books, either in the placid shades of Eyford or in the stately quiet of St. James's Square. But, though I did not foresee all this, I hoped much; and more as, my tale proceeding, my lord's generous emotion became evident. When I had done, he said many kind things to me on the peril I had escaped; and adding to their value by his manner of saying them, and by the charm which no other so perfectly possessed, he left me at last no resource but to quit the room in tears.

Treated thus with a kindness as much above my deserts as it was admirable in one of his transcendent rank, and assured by my lord's own mouth that henceforth, in gratitude for the service I had done him in Ferguson's room, he would provide for me, I should have stood, I ought to have stood, in the seventh heaven of felicity! But as suffering moves unerring on the track of weakness, and no man enjoys at any moment perfect bliss, I had first to learn the fate of the girl whose evasion I had contrived. And when a cautious search, and questions as crafty, satisfied me that she had really effected her escape from the house—probably in a man's dress, for one of the lacqueys complained of the loss of a suit of clothes—I had still a care; and a care which gnawed more sharply with every hour of ease and safety.

Needless to say, the one matter on which I had been reticent, the one actor whose presence on the scene I had not disclosed, lay at the bottom of my anxiety. Kind in action and generous in intention as the duke had shown himself, his magnanimity had not availed to oust the terror with which Smith's threats had imbued my mind; nor, confessing all else, had I brought myself to denounce that villain or detail the terms on which he had set me free. Though I had the great inducement to speak which the certainty that his arrest would release me presented, even this, and the security of the haven in which I lay, failed to hearten me to the point of hazard, so strong was the hold on my fears which this man had compassed, and

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so complete the slavery to which he had reduced my will.

But though at the time I found it a relief to be silent about him, this silence presently left me to cope with him, and with fears sufficiently poignant, which his memory awakened; the result being that, with prospects more favourable and a future better assured than I had ever imagined could be mine, or than any man of my condition had a right to expect, I still found this drop of poison in my cup.

It was not enough that, all things—and my patron—favouring me, I sank easily into the position of his privy clerk, that I retained that excellent room in which I had first been placed, that I found myself accepted by the household as a fact—so that never a man saved from drowning by a strand had a right to praise his fortune higher; it was not enough that, the wind from every quarter seeming to abate, the prisoners went for trial, and nothing said of me, while Ferguson, of whose complicity no legal proof could be found, lay in prison under the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus*, and kept silence; nor that a note came from Mary, ostensibly from Dunkirk, and without compromising me informed me of her safety. It was not enough, I say, that each and all of these things happened beyond my hopes; for in the midst of my prosperity, whether I stood writing at my lord's elbow in the stillness of the library, or moved at ease through the corridor, greeted with respect by my fellow-servants, and with civility by all, I was haunted by the thought and terror of Smith, and by the knowledge that at any moment the conspirator might appear to hurl me from this paradise. The secrecy which I had maintained about him doubled his power; even as the ease and luxury in which I lived presented in darker and fouler colours the sordid scenes and perils through which I had waded to this eminence.

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CHAPTER XXXIII

I BELIEVE I had spent a week, it might be more, in this situation of mingled ease and torment, when, coming down one morning after a hag-ridden night, I heard a stir in the hall; and, going that way to learn what it meant, met the servants returning in a crowd from the front, and talking low about something. Martin, who was foremost, cried, "Ha! ha! you are too late!" Then drawing me aside into a little den he had beside the passage, "They have taken him to the office," he said. "But, lord's sake, Mr. Price," he continued, lifting his eyebrows and pursing up his lips to express his astonishment, "who would have thought it? Her ladyship will be in a taking! I hope that there may be no more in it than appears!"

"In what?" said I.

"In this arrest," he answered, eyeing me with meaning, and then softly closing the door on us. "I hope it may end there. That is all I say! Between ourselves, Mr. Price."

"You forget," I cried with irritation, "that I know nothing about it! What arrest? And who is arrested?"

"Mr. Bridges' man of business."

"What Mr. Bridges?" I cried.

"Lord, Mr. Price, have you no wits?" he answered, staring at me. "My lord's mother's husband. The countess's husband, to be sure! You must know Mr. Smith?"

It needed no more than that; although, without the name, we might have gone on at cross purposes for an hour. But the name—the world held only one Smith for me, and he it seemed was arrested.

He was arrested! It was with the greatest difficulty that I could control my joy. Fortunately the place where we stood was ill-lighted, and Martin a man too much taken up with his own consequence to be over-observant of his companions. Still, for a

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moment I was perfectly overcome, the effervescence of my spirits such that I could do nothing but lean against the wall of the room, my heart bounding with joy and my head singing a pæan of jubilation. Smith was taken! Smith was in the hands of justice! Smith was arrested and I was free!

The first rapture past, however, I began to doubt; partly because the news seemed to be too good to be true, and partly because, though Martin had continued to babble, I had heard not a word. Wild, therefore, to have the thing confirmed, I cut him short; and crying, "But what Smith is it, do you say? Who is he?" I brought him back to the point at which he had left me.

"Why, Mr. Price," he answered, "I thought every one knew Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith, Mr. Bridges' factotum, land-steward, what you will! He married the countess's fine madam; madame they call her in the household, though she is no French thing, but Hertfordshire born, as I knew by her speech when my lord first took up with her. But not every one knows that."

"When my lord took up with her?" I said, groping among half-recognised objects; and beginning—so much light may come through the least chink—to see day.

Mr. Martin nodded confidentially. "That is how she came to be with my lady," he said. "And Mr. Smith, too! My lord met her somewhere when he was young and gay, and took up with her, and to please her got the place for Mr. Smith, who had been her flame before. However, my lord soon tired of her, for though she was a beauty she had common ways and was bold as brass; so when he parted from her she went back to her old love, who had first made her the mode; and married him. I have heard that my lord was in a pretty taking when he found her planted again at the countess's. But I have nothing to say against her."

"Does my lord—see her now?" I said with an effort.

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"When he does he looks pretty black at her. And I fancy that there is no love lost on her side."

"What did you say that—they called her?" I asked.

"Madame—Madame Monterey."

I remembered where I had heard the name before and who had borne it; and saw so much light that I was dazzled. "And my lord's mother—who married Mr. Bridges. She is a Papist?"

"Hush!" he said. "The less said about such things the better, Mr. Price."

But I persisted. "It was she who ran off with my Lord Buckingham, was it not," I said, "in King Charles's time? And held his horse while he killed her husband? And who had Mr. Killigrew stabbed in the streets; and——"

In a panic he clapped his hand on my mouth. "God, man!" he cried, "do you know where you are, or is your head turned? Do you think that this house is a fit place to give tongue to such things? Lord! You will be but a short time here, and to the pillory when you go, if you throw your tongue that way! I have not blabbed as much in twenty years, and would not for a kingdom! Who are you to talk of such as my lady?"

He was so righteously indignant at the presumption of which I had been guilty that, though it was his own indiscretion that had led me to the point, I made haste to mutter an apology; and doing this with the better grace for the remembrance that Smith was now powerless and his plans abortive. I contrived presently to appease him. But the ferment which the discovery wrought in my spirits moved me to escape as quickly as possible to my room, there to consider at leisure the miserable position in which—but for Smith's timely capture—I must have found myself.

A suspicion of the truth I had entertained before; but this certainty that the man I was to be trepanned into personating was my benefactor, and that in the plot his own mother was engaged, filled me with as

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much horror, when I considered the necessity of complying under which I might have lain, as thankfulness when I reflected on the escape I had had. Nor did these two considerations, overwhelming as they may appear, account for all the agitation I was experiencing. Mr. Martin, in speaking of Madame Monterey's origin, had mentioned Hertfordshire; and the name, bringing together two sets of facts hitherto so distant in my mind that I had never essayed to connect them, in a flash presented Smith and madame in their true colours. Why I had never before associated the Smith I now knew with the Templar Smith whom I darkly remembered as Jenny's accomplice in my early trouble—why I had not recognised in the woman's coarsely handsome features the charms that thirteen years before had fired my boy's blood and brought me to the foot of the gallows—these things are not more difficult to explain than why this one mention of Hertfordshire sufficed to raise the curtain; and not only to raise it, but to set the whole drama so plainly before me that I had been no wiser had I followed every scene in madame's life—witnessed her shameful *début* under Smith's protection, her seduction of my lord, her period of splendour—finally attended her in her declension when, a discarded mistress, she saw no better alternative than a marriage with her former protector.

How vastly this identification of the two conspirators increased, as well the loathing in which I held their schemes as my relief on the reflection that those schemes were futile, I will not say. Suffice it that the knowledge that but for Smith's arrest I must have chosen between playing the basest part in the world and running a risk whereat I shuddered, filled me with thankfulness immeasurable; a thankfulness which I did not fail to pour out on my knees, and which was in no degree lessened by a sad consciousness that in that dilemma I might have—ay, and should have—played the baser part!

No wonder that a hundred harrowing recollections crowded on my mind; or that under the pressure of

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these the tumult of my spirits became so powerful that I seized my hat, and, escaping from the house, sought in rapid movement some relief from the unpleasant retrospect. Crossing the Green Park, I chose a field path that led by the Pimlico marshes to Fulham; and gradually the songs of the larks and the spring sunshine leading my mind into a more cheerful groove, I began to dwell rather on the fact of my escape than on the crime from which I had escaped. Turning my back on Smith and his like, I began to build my house again; saw a smiling wife and babes, and days spent between my cottage home and my lord's papers; then a green old age and slippered feet tottering through the quiet shades of a library. Before I turned I had roofed the house with an honourable headstone; and felt my own tears rise in generous sympathy with the village assembled to do the old man honour.

In a word, tasting the full relief of emancipation, I became so gay and lightsome that the smoke and din of London, when I re-entered it, failed to subdue the unusual humour. I could have sung, I could have laughed aloud. Let the dead past bury its dead! For Ferguson, Smith, the Monterey—a fig! a fig! Who had come out best after all? And of their fine plottings and contrivings what had been the upshot? They had failed and I had triumphed; they were prisoners—I was free and safe.

Near the garden-wall of Buckingham House there was a bear dancing, and a press of people round it. I stayed to watch, and in my mood, found the fun so much to my taste that I threw the man a penny and went on laughing. A little farther, by the edge of the lake, was a man with a barrow and dice—then a novelty, though now so prevalent that at the last Sessions, I am told, the thing was presented for a nuisance. I stood and saw a man lose, and in the exaltation of my spirits, pushed him aside and laid down a shilling, and won, and won again—and again; whether the cog failed or the trickster who owned the barrow thought me a good bait. Either way I took

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up my winnings with an air and hectoring away as good a bully as another; placed for the moment so far above myself and common modesty, that I wondered whether I should ever sink back into the timid citizen, or feel my eyes drop before a bravo's.

Alas, in a moment, *quantum mutatus ab illo!* At the corner of the Cockpit, towards Sion House, I met Matthew Smith.

I had no doubt, I knew all in an instant. And I turned sick. He was free, alone, walking with his head high and an easy gait. Worse, he saw me; saw how I cowered and shrank into myself, and became another man at sight of him!

Slackening his pace as he came up, he halted before me, with that sly devil's grin on his face. "Well," he said, "how are you, Mr. Price? I was looking for you."

"For me?" I muttered. "I thought—I heard——"

"That I was arrested? A mistake!" he answered, continuing to smile. "A mistake! Some other Smith."

"And you were not arrested?" I whispered, hoarsely.

"Oh, I was arrested!" he answered jauntily. "And taken to the Secretary. And of course released. There, you have it all in a nutshell."

I uttered an exclamation; two words wrung from me by despair.

Thereat, and pretending to misunderstand me, "You thank God? Very kind of you, Mr. Price," said he, grinning. "Like master, like man, I see. The duke was kindness itself. But I must be going." And then, arresting himself in the act of leaving me, "You have heard," he continued, "that that poor devil Charnock stands his trial to-morrow? Porter is an evidence, and by Monday the parson will swing. It should be a warning to us," he continued, shaking his head with a smile that chilled the marrow in my bones, "what company we keep. A rascal like Porter might see you or me in the street—and swear

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to us. Ha! ha! It sounds monstrous odd, but so he might! But by-bye, Mr. Price. I must not keep you."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE state in which I crawled back to the house after this encounter may be conceived but not described. From an exaltation of mind to which the epithet delirious might be applied, I fell in an instant to a depth of abjectness as monstrous as my late felicity, but more real and better grounded. All the things, on my escape from which I had been congratulating myself, now lay in prospect; and formed a vista as gloomy as the point to which it tended was dreadful. To be a slave to the woman and man who had ruined my youth; to live outwardly at ease, while inwardly devoured by daily and hourly terror; to hang suspended between danger and baseness, comfort and treachery; to discern in my own destruction or my patron's the inevitable ending; above all, to foresee that I should choose the evil and eschew the good, and to wish it otherwise and be powerless to change it—these things, and particularly the last, filled me with anticipations of misery so great that I rolled on my bed, and cursed Providence and my fate; and next day went down so pale and ill and woe-begone that the very servants took note of it.

"Pheugh, Mr. Price," said Martin, "you might be Charnock himself, or Keyes, poor devil! You could not look more like hanging! What is it?"

I muttered that I was not well.

"It is Keyes I am sorry for," continued the steward, who was taking his morning draught, "if so be they go to the end with him. I have heard of a master given up by his servant, but never before of a servant hung on his master's evidence—and his master the one that drew him into it! Hang Captain Porter, say I! A fine captain!"

"Oh, they will let the poor devil live," said another.

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"Keyes?"

"Ay."

"Not they!" said Mr. Martin with a great show of wisdom. "He was in the Blues, do you see, my man, and if it spread there? No, he will swing. He will swing for the example. Don't you think so, Mr. Price? You are in there with my lord, and should know."

But I muttered something and escaped, finding solitude and my own reflections as tolerable as their gossip. A little later, my lord, sending for me, kept me close at work until evening; and this was so far fortunate, as the employment, by diverting my thoughts, helped to lift me out of the panic into which I had fallen. True, the news that the three conspirators were found guilty and were to die the following Monday, exactly as Smith had foretold, threw me again into the cold fit, and heralded another night of misery. But as it is not possible for mortals to lie long under the same peril without the sense of danger losing its edge, in three days I began to find life bearable. The stateliness of the household, the silence and books that surrounded me, the regular hours and steady employment, soothed my nerves; and Smith making no sign, and nothing occurring to indicate that he meant to keep his word or summon me to fulfil mine, I lulled myself into the belief that all was a dream.

Yet I was very far from being happy; to be that, with such apprehensions as never quite left me, was beyond my philosophy. And I had rude awakenings. One day it was the execution of Charnock, King, and Keyes at Tyburn, followed by the hawking of their last dying speeches and confessions in the streets, that jogged me out of my fancied security, and sent me sick and whey-faced from the windows. Another, it was the sentence on Sir John Friend and Sir William Parkyns, the two elderly citizens whom I had twice seen among the plotters, and never without wondering how they came to be there. A little later, three more suffered; and again the square rang with the shrill

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cries of the chapmen who peddled their last speeches from door to door. Against all these Captain Porter and a man called "Scum Goodman," both *participes criminis*, and persons of the most infamous character bore witness; their evidence corroborated by that of a man of higher standing, Mr. Prendergast. Whether they could not prove against Cassel and Ferguson, or reasons of State intervened, these, with several of their fellows, lay in prison untried; a course which, in other circumstances, might have involved the Government in obloquy. But so keen at this time was the feeling against the plotters, and so high the King's popularity, that he might have shed more blood had he chosen. Here, however, the executions stopped; and His Majesty showing mercy if not indulgence, the hue and cry gradually slackened until it was restricted to Sir John Fenwick; who was believed to be still in hiding in the country, and on whose punishment the King was reported to be firmly set.

How deeply these events and rumours, which formed the staple of conversation during the summer of '96, troubled my existence, I leave to the imagination; providing only that in proportion to the outward quiet of my life was the power to agitate which they exerted.

Moreover, there were times when a terror more substantial trespassed on my peace. One hot afternoon, going hastily into the hall, I found the servants all peeping, Mr. Martin holding the door open, a dozen faces staring in from the sunshine of the square, and my lord standing, very stiff and stately, on the threshold of his room, while in the middle of the floor stood a scowling man flashily dressed.

The duke was speaking when I appeared. "At the office, sir," I heard him say. "You misunderstood me. I can see you there only."

"Your Grace is hard on me," the man muttered with a glance that would be rebellious, and was hang-dog. "I have done the King good service, and this is the way I am requited. It is enough——"

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"It is more than enough, Captain Porter," my lord said, quietly taking him up. "At the office, if you please. This house is for my friends."

"And the King's friends? They may shift for themselves?" the wretch—who even then wore finery bought with blood—cried bitterly.

"The King is served in many ways," my lord answered with a fine air of contempt. "Martin, the door! And remember, another time I am not within to Captain Porter. At three in the office, sir, if you please."

The man slunk away at that; but as he passed through the doorway, I heard him mutter that when Sir John Fenwick was taken he would see; and that, proud as some people were now, they would be glad to save their necks when the time came. He passed out of sight with that; and, hearing my lord speak, I turned, and saw Matthew Smith, whom I had not before noticed, waiting on him with a letter. The duke, pausing on the threshold of the library, broke the seal, and ran his eye over the paper.

"I will send an answer," he said, "later in the day. Or——" and he looked up quickly. "Are you returning, sir?"

"If your Grace pleases."

"It shall be ready by two o'clock," my lord answered stiffly. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, your Grace."

And the duke went in. The colloquy had been of the slightest; but I had noted that my patron's tone, when he spoke to Smith, was guarded and civil, if distant; and that through the few formal words they had exchanged peered a sort of understanding. This shook me; and when Smith turned to me, a faint sneer on his lips, and told me that I was a bold man, my heart was water. He was at home here as everywhere; what could I do against him?

"Do you understand, Mr. Price?" he repeated. "Or are you a bigger fool than I take you for?"

"Why?" I stammered.

"Why? Why, to push in on Porter after that

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fashion," he muttered under his breath—for Martin was making towards us. "Lucky he did not recognise you and denounce you! For a groat he would do it—or to spite the duke! Take care, man," he continued seriously, "if you do not want to join Charnock, whose head is in airy quarters to-night."

This left me the prey to a new terror; for I had once seen Porter at Ferguson's lodging, and could not shut my eyes to the reasonableness of the warning. I saw myself beset by dangers on that side also; therefore went for a time on eggs, and trembled at every sound; indeed, for a fortnight I never passed the threshold—excusing myself on the ground of vertigo if sent on an errand. In the course of that fortnight I had a thousand opportunities of contrasting the quiet in which I lived, behind the dull windows of the great house, with the dangers into which I might at any moment be flung; and if any man ever repented of anything, I repented of my lack of candour respecting Smith.

From time to time I saw him pass—grim, reserved, a walking menace. When he looked up at the windows, I read mastery and a secret knowledge in his eyes; while the way in which he went and came, free and unquestioned, was itself a monition. What wonder that I feared this man, who, while Charnock's head mouldered on a spike on Temple Bar, and Friend and Parkyns passed to the gallows, walked the Strand and lounged in the Mall, as safe in appearance as my lord himself?

I knew that at any moment he might call upon me to fulfil my word. Whether, the demand being such as to allow me leisure to forecast the consequences, I should have complied, or, taking my courage in my hands, have thrown myself on my lord's indulgence, I cannot now say; for in the issue an unforeseen shifting of scene prevented my calculations, and hurried me onwards, whether I would or no.

It happened in this way. One afternoon there came a great bustle in the square; and who should it be but the countess, my lord's mother, come to

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visit him in her coach-and-six, with a coach-and-four behind her, and such a paraphernalia of gentlewomen and negro pages, outriders and running footmen, as drew together all the ragamuffins from the mews, and fairly brought back King Charles's days. As the great coach, which held six inside, swung and lumbered to a stand at the door I saw a painted face, with bold black eyes, glaring from the window, cheek by jowl with a parrot and three or four spaniels; and I waited to see no more, one glance certifying me that this was the lady to whose house Smith had taken me. Smith himself was in attendance on her, and a gentleman in a plain black suit and wig—who was a Papist priest if I ever saw one—and Monterey, and two or three other gentlewomen; and, as I had no mind to be recognised by these, or, for that matter, by their mistress, I made haste to retire behind the flock of servants whom Martin had marshalled in the hall to do the honours.

My lord went out to the coach and brought the countess in, with a great show of reverence; and for three-quarters of an hour they were closeted together in his room. I took advantage of this to retire upstairs, and had been wiser had I stayed there, or, better still, slipped out at the back. But a craving came on me to see Monterey again, and, with the knowledge I now had, ascertain if she really was my old flame. This drew me to the hall again; where, the crowd being great, and the servants taken up with teasing the countess's parrot and blackamoors, I managed to avoid observation and at the same time see what I wanted. The woman who had once been all the world to me—and of whom I could not now think without tender regret, directed, not to her, but to the state of blissful dawning passion of which she had been the cause, and whereof no man is twice capable—was still handsome in a coarse fashion, and when seen at a distance. I could not deny that. But if I desired revenge I had it; for not only was her complexion gone, so that her good looks vanished when the viewer approached, but her lips had grown

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thin and her face hard—with the indescribable hardness which speaks of past sin long grown bitter, and an hourly, daily recognition that the wages of sin is death.

Presently, while Mr. Martin was pressing his civilities on her, and I, from a corner near the inner door, was curiously reading her countenance, the door of my lord's room opened, and the countess came out, supported on the one side by the duke's arm, on the other by her great ebony cane. The servants hurried to form two lines; and I suppose curiosity led me to press nearer than was prudent, or her eyes were of peculiar sharpness; or perhaps she looked for me, and had I not been there would have called for me. At any rate, she had not moved three steps towards the coach before her gaze, roving along the line of servants, alighted on me; and she stood.

"I'll have *that* rascal!" she cried in her high, shrill voice—and she pointed to me with her cane, and stood. "He looks as if butter would not melt in his mouth, but if he is not a lad of wax, call me a street slut! Hark you, my man; you come with me. Bid him, Shrewsbury!"

My lord, his face flushing, spoke low, and seemed to make demur; but she persisted.

"Odd's life! you make me sick!" she cried irritably. "You will not do this, and you fancy that! The servants—— Go to for a fool! In my time master was master, and if any blabbed, man or maid, it was strip and whip! But now—do you quarrel with me, or do you not?"

The duke shrugged his shoulders, and smiled uneasily. "Times are somewhat changed, madam," he said.

"Ay, by G——, they are!" she cried, swearing roundly. "And why? Because there are no men nowadays, but mealy-mouthed Josephs, like that trembler yonder, whose heart is in his boots because I want him to carry a message." And she pointed to me again with her long cane, while her head quivered with excitement, and palsy, and age. "Sort

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him out ; sort him out, and send him with me ; or we quarrel, my lord."

" Well, madam, your will is law in this house," the duke said ; " but——"

" But no lies ! " she cried. " D'ye send him ? "

My lord bowed reluctantly. " Go," he said, looking at me.

" And bid him do as I tell him," she cried sharply. " But he had better, or—— Still, tell him, tell him."

" Price," my lord said soberly, " the countess is good enough to wish you to do an errand for her. Be good enough to consider yourself at her disposal, and go with the coach now. Be easy," he continued, nodding pleasantly—it was impossible for me to hide my apprehensions—" her ladyship needs you for a week only."

" Ay, sure," she cried. " After that he may go to the devil for me ! "

CHAPTER XXXV

RIGHTLY has the Latin poet sung of the *dura pectora* of the Fates ; who either, resistless, rout all human resolutions, or, where the mind has been hardened to meet the attack, turn the poor wretch's flank, and lo ! while he squares his shield, and shortens his spear to meet the occasion, *habet*—he has it under the fifth rib.

So it was with me. While I dreamed of resistance, and hardened my heart and set fast my feet, Fate cross-buttocked me ; and I fell, not knowing. The countess's coach bore me away, unresisting ; and Smith, whom I hated as I never hated even Ferguson, gave me the word. After that resistance was of little use. From my plain clothes to the long curled peruke, the cravat, ruffles, and fine suit in which I had once before paraded myself was but a step ; I took it perforce and under threat, and being conducted, when I was ready, into the countess's chamber to wait her pleasure, could have fancied the last six months a dream—could have fancied the conspirators

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still at work, Captain Barclay still pacing the piazza, my lord still a stranger to me, the library a vision; in a word, I could have fancied all those events, which had filled half a year, to be no more than creatures of the imagination, so unchanged was the great silent room where my lady, while I waited, played picquet with Monterey, amid the gorgeousness of her rose-and-silver suite.

The monkey gibbered as of old, and the parrot vied with the broidered parrots on the wall; and now, as then, the air was heavy with scent and musk and ambergris, while the light, cunningly arranged, fell on the part where the countess sat, now grumbling and now swearing, and now, while the cards were dealing, thumping the floor impatiently with her stick. She had so perfectly the grand air of a past generation that when her eye turned in my direction I trembled, and gave up thought of resistance; yet when she resumed the game, she gradually—and more and more completely, as I watched—sank into a querulous, feeble, fierce old woman, whose passion, where it did not terrify, moved to derision, and whose fads and fancies, patent as the day, placed her at the mercy of all who cared to flatter and cozen her.

Madame was about it; now letting her win, and then gaining a slight advantage; mingling hints of old vanities and conquests (whereat my lady grew garrulous) with new scandals, coarse and spiteful; whining a little when my lady, in a fury caused by a bad hand, struck her across the face with a fan to teach her to be awkward; but cheering up at once when the countess's mood changed with the cards. In a word, as she had betrayed me young, she cozened my lady old; but noting her features grown hard with time, and her eyes grown lifeless, and the devil grinning plainly from behind the mask that once had been so fair, it was a wonder to me that even the countess was deceived.

Presently my lady threw down her cards in a rage, and, calling her opponent a cheating slut, diverted her anger in my direction.

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"What is the gaby doing, standing there like a gawk?" she shrieked. "Why is he not about his business?"

Monterey whispered her that I had not had my instructions.

"Then give them, and let him go!" she cried. "Where is the ring? Here, you daw in peacock's feathers—like my son, indeed? About as like as that squinting vixen Villiers is to a beauty! Take that, and ride with Matthew Smith, and give it to the gentleman you will meet at the inn at Ashford, and say—Monterey, tell him what to say."

"Say, 'Colonel Talbot sends this ring, and his service.' And if the gentleman asks 'Whither?' or this, or that, to whatever he asks, answer thus: 'I am not here, Sir John, to answer questions. Favour me by conveying that ring and my services whither you are going. I do not talk, but when the time comes I shall act.'"

"*C'est tout!*" said the countess, nodding approval. "If you are not man enough to learn that, whip you for a noodle! Say it, man."

But when I went to say it, first I could not remember it, and broke down; and then, when I had got the sentences into my head, my lady storming at me all the while for a fool and an imbecile, I but whimpered them, bringing no heart to the task. The countess, when she saw that, flew out at me afresh, and threw first the vapours bottle and then her cane at me; the latter of which, breaking a piece of china, put her fairly beside herself. "Come here!" she shrieked, swaying to and fro in her chair. "Do you hear, you puling, psalm-singing canter? Come here, I say!" And when, trembling and scared, I had approached, she leant forward, and seizing hold of my ear, as Ferguson had seized it, she twisted it with such unexpected strength and spite that I roared with pain, and fairly fell on my knees beside her.

"There is for you, *gros cochon!*" she cried. "So you *can* speak up when you like! Now go to the end of the room, my man, and play your part again,

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and play it better ! Or, by ——, I will have up those who shall lash your back to the bone. Hoity, toity ! These are fine times, when scum like you, my lad, put on airs ! ”

This was not the discipline, nor were these the threats, to give an actor courage ; but in sheer desperation I spoke up, and this time had the good fortune to please her ; and, Monterey prompting me, and pushing me this way and that, I went through my part a dozen times. At length the countess expressed herself satisfied, and with a grim nod, and an “ Odd’s my life, he is not so unlike, after all ! ” gave me leave to go. When I was half-way to the door, however, she called me back, and after I had timidly obeyed, she sat awhile, glowering at me in silence. At last, “ No,” she said irritably, “ it is too late ! ” — and she struck on the floor with her stick. “ It is too late to turn back ! The cross devil did nothing but thwart me to-day, and what he will not do *bon gré*, he shall do perforce. He has brought it on himself, and he must abide his *destin* ! Yet—Monterey ! ”

The woman was at her side in a moment. “ Yes, madam ? ”

“ I suppose that there is no danger of—of a *contre-temps*,” she said, stirring restlessly in her chair. “ Sir John will get away ? They will not take him, and find the ring on him—and learn whose it is ? ”

On that, if I had been quick, and had my wits and courage at command, I should have thrown myself at her feet ; and so I might have opened her eyes. But I wavered, and before I had gathered heart to do it, the waiting-woman, smooth and watchful, was in the breach.

“ Ashford, my lady, is only three hours’ riding from Dymchurch in the Marsh,” she said, “ where the boat waits for him to-morrow night. Sir John is well mounted, and it will be odd if, after baffling pursuit for months, he be taken in that time.”

“ Yes, yes ! ” my lady said querulously. “ That is so. Then let him go ! Let him go ! Though you are a fool to boot. A man is taken or not taken in

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less than three hours. Even now, if that contrary devil of a son of mine had not argued with me, and argued with me to-day—but, let him go! Let him go!”

The woman lost no time in taking her at her word, and hurrying me out; not by the main entrance through which I had come in, but by the little side door, leading to the dingy closet at the head of the private staircase. On the dusty table in the closet an unshaded lamp burned brightly, and beside it stood Matthew Smith, wearing a cloak, riding-boots, and a great flapped hat. He looked eagerly at the woman, his eyes shining in the glare of the lamp; but he did not speak until she had closed the door behind her. Then, “Is it right?” he whispered.

She nodded.

“You have got the ring?”

She gave it him with a smile of triumph.

He looked at it, and with a grim face slipped it into his pocket. “Good,” he said. “And now, my friend”—this to me—“the sooner we are away the better.”

But my gorge rose. On the table beside him, in the glare of the lamp, lay a cloak and holsters, a mask, sword, and riding-whip. I knew what these objects meant, and for whom they were prepared; and at the prospect of the dark night, the journey, the perils of the unknown road, I cried out that I would not go! I would not go! And I tried to force my way back into the countess’s room—with what intention Heaven knows.

Smith whipped between me and the door. “You fool!” he said, pushing me back. “Are you mad? Or don’t you know me yet?”

“I know you too well!” I cried, beside myself with rage, and with apprehensions of the plunge on the brink of which I stood. “You have cursed me from the first day I saw you at Ware! You have been the curse of my life! You and that Jezebel!”

“Are you mad?” he said again; and threatened me with his hand.

But she came a step nearer to me, and peered at

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me; then, after a look, took the lamp from the table and held it to my face. "At Ware?" she said. "At Ware?" And then, putting the lamp back on the table, she fell to laughing. "He is right!" she said. "I know him now. But you told me that his name was Taylor."

"Taylor?" he said wrathfully. "So it is; and Price, and half a dozen other names, for aught I know. What does it matter what his name is?"

"Oh, it matters very much," she said, affecting to ogle me in an exaggerated fashion. "He is an old flame of mine. His face always brought something to my mind—but I thought that it was his likeness to the duke."

He cursed her old flames, and the duke. And then, "What does it mean?" he said. "Who is he?"

"He is the lad we left at Ware—in the old woman's room," she answered, her voice sinking, and growing soft and almost tender. "Lord! it seems so long ago, it might have happened in another life! You remember him, Matt? You saw him with me at 'The Rose' one night? The first night I met you?"

He looked at me long and strangely. "And what does it mean?" he said at last, between wonder and suspicion.

She shrugged her shoulders. "*Sais pas!*" she answered. "Ask him!"

"You ruined me once!" I cried to them. "And he saved me! And now you would have me ruin him. You are devils, you are! Devils! But I defy you! I will not do it!"

He did not answer, but continued to stare at me as if he discerned or suspected that there was more in this than appeared on the surface. At length the woman laughed, and he turned to her, rage in his face. "I see nothing to laugh at," he said.

"But I do!" she answered pertly. "You three all mixed up! It would make a cat laugh, my lad."

He cursed her. "Have done with that!" he said fiercely. "And say what is to be done."

"Done?" she answered briskly, and in a tone of

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genuine surprise. "Why, that which was to be done. What difference does this make?"

But he looked at her, pondering darkly, as if it did make a difference. I suppose that somewhere, deep down in his nature, there lurked a grain of superstition, which found in this singular coincidence, this sudden stringing together of persons long parted, an evil omen. Or it may be he had still some scrap of conscience left which, seared and deadened as it was, stirred and smarted at this strange upheaval of an old crime. At any rate, "I don't know," he growled at last. "I don't like it, and that is flat. There is some practice in this."

"There is a fool in it," she answered naively. "And there are like to be two!"

I thought to back him up, and I braced myself against the wall, to which I had retired. "I won't go!" I said doggedly. "I will call for help in the streets first!"

"You will do as you are told," she answered coolly. "And you," she continued to Smith in a voice that stung, "are you going to give up now, when all is safe? Will you stand to my lord as this poor silly fellow stands to you? Have you waited for years for your revenge—to move aside now? Why, by G—d, the duke is worth ten of you. He is a man, at any rate. He is——"

"Peace, girl!" he cried, with I know not what of menace in his tone.

"Then, will you go?"

"Yes, I will go!" he answered between his teeth. "But by the Lord! you slut, if ill comes of it, I will wring your neck! I will, so help me Heaven! You shall deceive no other man! If there is practice in this, if this tool is here by your connivance——"

"He is not!" she answered. "Be satisfied."

Apparently he was satisfied, for he drew a deep breath and stood silent. She turned to me. "Get ready," she said sharply.

"No," I muttered, summoning all my resolution, "I shall not go. I—I have not——"

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But the refusal died on my lips as Smith turned to me. The struggle with the woman had roused his passions; and I read in his eyes such a glare of ferocity as chilled my blood and unstrung my knees. Nor was that all; for when I went, trembling, to take the cloak, "One moment," he said grimly, "not so fast, my friend. Let us understand one another before we start. Mr. Price or Mr. Taylor or whatever your name is, take note, do you hear me, of three things. One, that the business we are on is life or death—to both of us. Do you grasp that?"

I muttered a shuddering assent.

"Secondly," he continued, with the same gruesome civility, "my hand will never be more than six inches from the butt of a pistol, until I see this house again. Do you grasp that?"

I nodded.

"Thirdly, at the least sign of treachery or disobedience on your part, I blow your brains out first—and my own afterwards, if that be necessary. Do you grasp that?"

I nodded.

"That is especially well," he said. "Because the last item is important to you. On the other hand, Mr. Price, play Honest John with me, and in forty-eight hours you shall be back in your master's house, free and safe; and I shall trouble you no more. Do you understand *that*?"

I said I did; my teeth chattering and my eyes seeking to evade his.

"Then, now, you may get into those things," he said. "And do you ride when I bid you, and halt when I bid you, and speak when I say speak, and be silent when I say be silent—do those four things, I say, and you will die in your bed. They are all I ask."

I stooped, shaking all over, to take up the boots. "Heart up, pretty?" cried the woman, with an old laugh that broke off short with a sort of quaver. "It is clear that you are not born to be hanged. And for the rest——"

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“Peace, peace, wench,” said Smith impatiently.
“And dress him!”

CHAPTER XXXVI

It wanted two hours of midnight on a fine night when we two rode over London Bridge, and through a gap in the houses saw the river flowing below, a ripple of silver framed in blackness, and so cold to the eye that I shivered, feeling a return of all the vague fears and apprehensions that, originally awakened by the prospect of the journey, had been set at rest for the time by the awe in which I held my companion. I recalled a dozen stories of footpads and highwaymen, outrage and robbery, and found but cold comfort in the reflection that the Kent Road, from the amount of traffic that used it, was accounted one of the safest in England. It was not wonderful that, with nerves so disordered, I went in front of danger; or that when—opposite the Marshalsea, where the chain crosses the road, by the entrance to White Horse Yard—a man came quickly out of a passage and caught hold of my companion’s rein, I cried out—and all but turned my horse to fly. Even Smith appeared to be taken off his guard; for, after bidding me beware what I did, he called with the same harshness to the man to release the rein, or take the consequences.

“Oh, I am all right,” the fellow answered roughly, peering at him through the darkness. “You are Mr. Smith?”

“Well?”

“Fairholt sent me—to stop you.”

“Fairholt!”

“Ay, he is here.”

“Here?” my companion cried, in a tone between rage and surprise. “What the ——! Why, he should be—you know where, by this time!”

“Ay, but his horse threw him this morning; and he is lying at the ‘White Horse’ here, with a broken leg!”

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Smith cursed the absent man for a fool. "I wish he had broken his neck!" he said savagely. And then after an interval, "Has he sent anybody?"

"He has had something else to think about," the man answered drily. "And so would you, master, with his leg!"

Smith swore again, and sat gloomily silent.

"He says if you can stead it off for twenty-four hours," the man went on, "he will arrange that——"

"No names," Smith cried, sharply.

"Well that—some one shall take his place and do the job."

Smith did not answer for a full minute, but, at length, in a curt, incisive tone, "Tell him, yes," he said. "I will see to it. And you—keep a still tongue, will you? You were going with him, I suppose?"

"Ay."

"And you will come with the other?"

"Maybe. If not I shall not blab."

Smith showed by a nod that the man had taken his meaning; after which, bidding him good-night, he pricked up his horse. "Come on," he said, addressing me with impatience. "I thought to have had companions, and so ridden more securely. But we must make the best of it."

Heaven knows that I too would have liked companions, and took the road again dolefully enough. Nor was that the worst; Smith, in speaking to the stranger, had mentioned Fairholt. Now, I knew the name, and knew the man. He was one of the messengers attached to the Secretary's office; one whose business it was to execute warrants and arrest political prisoners. But what had Smith, riding to a secret interview with a man outlawed and in hiding to do with messengers? With Fairholt?

And then, as if this were not enough to disturb me with a view of treachery, black as gulf seen by traveller through a rift in the mist—if this glimpse, I say, were not enough, how was I going to reconcile Smith's statement that he had expected companions

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with his first cry, uttered in wrath and surprise—that Fairholt ought to be by this time—well, at some distant point?

In fine, I was so far from being persuaded that Smith had expected company that I suspected he had made other arrangements; and those of a most perfidious character. As the horses' hoofs rang monotonously on the hard road, I peered forward into the gloom, fearing all things and doubting all things; for certain I feared and doubted nothing so much as I did the dark and secret man beside me, whose scheming brain, spinning plot within plot, each darker and more involved than the other, kept all my ingenuity at a stretch to overtake the final end and purpose he had at heart.

Indeed, I despair of conveying to others how gravely this sombre companionship and more sombre uncertainty aggravated the terrors of a journey that at the best of times must have been little to my taste. To the common risk of the road, deserted at that hour by all save cut-purses and rogues, was added a suspicion, as much more harassing than these as unseen dangers ever surpass the known. It was in vain that I strove to divert my mind from the figure by my side; neither the bleak heath above Greenwich—whence we looked back at the reddish haze that canopied London, and forward to where the Thames marshes stretched eastward under night—nor the gibbet on Dartford Brent, where a body hung in chains, poisoning the air—nor the light that shone dim and solitary across the river, and puzzled me until he told me that it was Tilbury—none of these things, I say, though they occupied my thoughts by turns and for a moment, had power to drive him from my mind or divert my fears to dangers more apparent. And in this mood, now glancing askance at him, and now moving uneasily under his gaze, I might have ridden to Rochester if my ear had not detected—when we were two or three miles short of the city—the sound of a horse trotting fast on the road behind us.

At first it came so faintly on the breeze that I

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doubted; thinking it might be either the echo of our hoofs or a pulse beating in my ears. Then, on a hard piece of ground, it declared itself unmistakably; and again as suddenly it died away.

At that I spoke involuntarily. "He has stopped," I said.

Smith laughed in his teeth. "He is crossing the wet bottom, fool—by the creek," he said.

And before I could answer him the dull sound of a horse galloping fast, but moving on the turf that ran alongside the road, proved him to be right. "Draw up!" he whispered, in something of a hurry; and then, as I hesitated, "Do you hear?" he continued, sharply seizing my rein. "What do you fear? Do you think that night-birds prey on night-birds?"

Whatever I feared, I feared him more; and turning my horse, I sat shivering. For, notwithstanding his confident words, I saw that he was handling his holster, I knew that he was drawing a pistol, and it was well the suspense was short. Before I had time for many qualms, the horseman, a dark figure, lurched on us through the gloom, pulled his horse on to its haunches, and, with raised hand, cried to us to deliver.

"And no nonsense!" he added sharply. "Or a brace of balls will soon——"

Smith laughed. "Box it about!" he said.

"Hallo!" the stranger answered, taking a lower tone, and he peered at us, bending over his horse's neck. "Who are you that fly by night?"

"A box-it-about!" my companion answered with tartness. "That is enough for you. So good-night, and I wish you better luck next time."

"But——"

"St!" Smith answered, cutting him short. "I am going to my father, and the less said about it the better."

"So? Well, give him my love, then." And backing his horse, the stranger bade us good-night, and, with a curse on his bad fortune, turned and rode off. Smith saw him go; then wheeling, we took the road again.

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Safely, however, as we had emerged from the encounter, and far as it went towards proving that we bore a talisman against the common perils of travellers, it was not of a kind to reassure a law-abiding man. To be hung as the accomplice of foot-pads and high-tobies was scarcely a better fate than to be robbed and wounded by them, and I was heartily glad when we found ourselves on the outskirts of Rochester, and stopping at a house of call outside the sleeping city, roused a drowsy hostler, who, late as the hour was, gave us entrance and a welcome.

Safe in these comfortable quarters, on a sanded hearth, before a rekindled fire, with lights, and food and ale at my elbow, and a bed in prospect, I found my misgivings less hard to bear than on the dark road above Tilbury flats. I began to think less of the body creaking in its irons on the gibbet above Dartford, and more of the chances of ultimate safety, and Smith, growing civil, if not genial, I went on to count the hours that must elapse before, our miserable mission ended, I should see London again. After all, why should I not see London again? What was to prevent me? Where lay the hindrance? In three days—in three days we should be back. So I told myself, and, looking up, met Smith's eyes brooding gloomily on me.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SUCH a night ride as I have described would have been impossible, or outrageously dangerous, a year or two later, when a horde of disbanded soldiers, dismissed from the colours by the Peace of Ryswick, took to the roads for a subsistence, and for a period, until they perished miserably, made even the purlieus of Kensington unsafe.

At the time of which I write we ran risk enough, as has been demonstrated; but the reasons which induced Smith to leave London under cover of dark-

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ness may be conceived. Apparently they did not extend to the rest of the journey; for, after lying late at Rochester, we rode on by Sittingbourne to Faversham, and thence, after a comfortable dinner, turned south by Badlesmere, and so towards Ashford, where we arrived a few minutes after nightfall.

Those who are acquainted with the Old Inn at the entrance into Ashford will remember the yard and stables, which are as conspicuous for size and commodiousness as the house, a black and white building a little withdrawn from the street, is marked by the lack of those advantages. I believe that the huge concourse thither of cattle-drovers at the season of the great fairs is the cause of this; those persons lying close themselves, but needing space for their beasts; and at such times I can imagine that the roomy *enceinte*, and those long lines of buildings, may be cheerful.

But seen, as we saw them, by the last cold light of a dull evening, with nothing clear or plain save the roof ridge, and that black against a pale sky, they and the place looked infinitely dismal. Nor did any warmth of welcome, such as even poor inns afford to all and sundry, amend the first impression of gloom and decay which the house and its surroundings conveyed to the mind. On the contrary, not a soul was to be seen, and we had ridden half-way across the yard, and Smith had twice called "House! House!" before any one appeared.

Then the upper half of a stable-door creaked open, and a man, holding up a great horn lanthorn, peered out at us.

"Are you all asleep?" cried my companion, and, when the man made no answer, but still continued to stare at us, "What is in the house," Smith added, angrily, "that you stick out your death's-head to frighten company? Is it lace, or old Nantz, or French goods? Anyway, box it about, and be done with it, and attend to us."

"Right, master, right, I am coming," the man answered, suddenly rousing himself, and opening the

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lower half of the door, he came heavily out. "At your service," he said, "but we have little company."

"The times are bad?"

"Ay, they looked a bit better six months back."

"But nothing came of it?"

"No, worse luck."

"And all that is called for now—is common Hollands, I suppose?"

The fellow grinned. "Right," he said. "You have the hang of it, master."

My companion slid to the ground, and began to remove his pistols and saddle-bag. "Still you have some guests, I suppose?" he said.

"Ay, one," the man answered slowly, and I thought reluctantly.

"Is he, by any chance, a man of the name of—but never mind his name," Smith continued, checking himself. "Is he a surgeon?"

The hostler, or host—for he had the air of playing both parts—a big clumsy fellow, with immobile features and small eyes—looked at us thoughtfully and chewed a straw. "Well, maybe," he said, at last. "I never asked him." But without more ado he took Smith's horse by the rein and lurched through the door into the stable, the lanthorn swinging in his hand, and dimly disclosing a long vista of empty stalls and darkling roof. As I followed, leading my sorry mare, a horse in a distant stall whinnied loudly.

"That is his hack, I suppose," said Smith; and, taking up the lanthorn which the other had just set down, he moved through the stable in the direction whence the sound had come.

The man of the house uttered something between an oath and a grunt of disgust, and, letting fall the flap of the saddle which he had raised that he might slacken the girths, he went after him. "Softly, master," he said, "every man to his——"

But Smith was already standing with the lanthorn held high, gazing at a well-shaped chestnut horse, that, pricking its ears, turned a gentle eye on us.

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"Umph, not so bad," my companion said. "His horse, I suppose?"

The man with the straw looked the animal over thoughtfully. At length, with something between a grunt and a sigh, "He came on it," he said.

"He won't go on it in a hurry."

"Why not?" the man asked, more quickly than he had yet spoken; and he looked from the horse to my companion with a hint of hostility.

"Have you no eyes?" Smith answered, roughly. "The off-fore has filled; the horse is as lame as a mumper!"

"Gammon!" cried the other, evidently stung, and then, "You know a deal about horses in London! And never saw one or a blade of green grass, maybe, until you came Kent way!"

"As you please," Smith said, indifferently. "My business is not with the horse but the master. So take us in, my friend, and give us supper, for I am famished. Afterwards, if you please, we will see him."

"That is as he pleases," the fellow answered sulkily. But he raised no second objection, and when we had littered down the horses he led the way into the house by a back door, and so along a passage and down a step or two, which landed us in a room with a sanded floor, a fire, and a show of comfort as welcome as it was unexpected. Here he left us to remove our cloaks, and we presently heard him giving orders, and bustling about the kitchen.

The floor of the room in which he had left us was sunk a little below the road outside, and the ceiling being low, and the window of greater width than height, and the mantel-shelf having for ornament a row of clean delf and pewter, I thought that no place had ever seemed more snug and cosy. But the comfort I looked to derive from surroundings so promising was dashed by Smith's first words; who, as soon as we were alone, came close to me, under cover of unclasping my cloak, and in a guarded tone, and with a look of the grimmest, warned me to play my part.

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"We go upstairs after supper, and in five minutes it will be done," he muttered. "Go through with it boldly and in twenty-four hours you may be back in London. But fail or play me false, Mr. Price—and, by Heaven! I put a ball through your head first, and my own afterwards. Do you mark me? Do you mark me, man?"

I whispered in abject nervousness—seeing that he was indeed in earnest—that I would do my best, and he handed me a ring, which was doubtless the same that the countess had given to her woman. It had a great dog cut cameo-wise on the stone, which I think was an opal, and it fitted my finger not ill. But I had no more than time to glance at it before the host and his wife, a pale, scared-looking woman, came in with bacon and eggs and ale, and as one or other of them stayed with us while we ate, and watched us closely, nothing more passed. Smith talked indifferently to them, sometimes about the fruit harvest, and sometimes in cant phrases about the late plot; nor were the arrest of Hunt of Dymchurch (who had been used to harbour people until they crossed), or the time-table of Gill's ship, or Mr. Birkenhead's many escapes, left without mention. Probably the man and woman were testing Smith; if so, he satisfied them, for when we were finished our meal, and he asked openly if Sir John would see us, they raised no objection, but the man, taking a light from the woman's hand, led the way up a low-browed staircase to the door of a room over that in which we had supped. Here he knocked, and a voice bidding us enter, Smith went in, and I after him, my heart beating furiously.

The room, which resembled the one beneath in being low in the ceiling, looked the lower for the gaunt height of its occupant, who had risen and stood in the middle of the floor to receive us. Thin and spare by nature, the meagre and poor-looking dress which he wore added to the singularity of his aspect. With a dry-as-dust complexion, and a three-days'-old beard, he had eyes light-coloured, quick-glancing, and

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sanguine, and notwithstanding the danger and uncertainty of his position, a fugitive in this wayside house, with a thousand guineas on his head—for I never doubted I was looking on Sir John Fenwick—his manner was at one moment arrogant and boastful, and at another dreamy. He had much of the air of a visionary; nor could anyone be long in his company without discerning that here was the very man for our purpose; one to whom all his geese were swans, and a clasp of the hand, if it marched with his hopes, of as much value as a pledge signed and sealed.

With all this it is to be confessed that, on first recognising us, his face fell, and his chagrin was unmistakable. "It is you, Smith, is it?" he said, with a sigh. "Well, well, and I thought it was Birkenhead. Brown said it was not, but I thought that it must be. It is not everyone who knows Birkenhead when he sees him."

"No, Sir John, that is true."

"However, I shall meet him in the morning. I go on board at New Romney at four, and doubtless he will be with Gill. When we return——"

"Ah, Sir John—times will be changed then!" Smith said, with a fine show of enthusiasm.

"They will, sir, with this Dutch crew and their low beast of a master swept into the sea! And gentlemen in their homes again! I have been amusing myself the last half-hour," he continued, his eyes wandering to the table, on which lay a litter of papers, an inkhorn, and two snuffy candles, "with plans for a new wing at Fenwick, and I cannot decide whether I shall build it in the old style or on the lines of the other house at Hexham. I am divided between the two. The Hall is the more commodious; the Abbey has greater stateliness. However—I must put up my scripts now, for I must be in the saddle in an hour. Have you commands for the other side of the water, Mr. Smith? If so, I am at your service."

Smith answered with a little hesitation. "Certainly, my business has to do with that, Sir John," he

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said. And he was proceeding to explain when the baronet, rubbing his hands in glee, cut him short.

"I thought so," he cried, glowing with satisfaction. "'Gad, it is so with everyone. They are all of a tale. My service, and my respects, and my duty—all to go, you know where; and it is 'Make it straight for me, Sir John,' and 'You will tell the King, Sir John?' and 'Answer for me as for yourself, Sir John!' all day long when they can come at me. Why, man, you know something, but you would be surprised what messages I am carrying over. And when people have not spoken they have told me as much by a look, and those the least likely. Men who ten years ago were as black Exclusionists as old Noll himself!"

"I can believe it, Sir John," Smith answered with gravity; while I, who knew how the late conspiracy had united the whole country in King William's defence—so that the man who refused to sign the Commons' Association to that end went in peril of violence—listened with as much bewilderment, as I had felt three minutes before, when I heard how this same man, a fugitive and an outlaw, flying beyond seas, had been employing his time!

However, he was as far from guessing what was in my mind as he was from doubting Smith's sincerity; and encouraged by the latter's assent he continued: "It is strange to me, Mr. Smith, how the drunken Dutch boor stands a day! Strange and passing strange! But it cannot last. It cannot last out the year. These executions have opened men's eyes finely, and by Christmas we shall be back."

"A merry Christmas it will be," said Smith, the hypocrite. "Heaven grant it. But you have not asked, sir, who it is I have with me."

At that and at a sign he made me, I let fall the collar of the cloak I was wearing, which, up to this time, in obedience to his directions I had kept high about my chin. Sir John, his attention drawn to me, as much by my action as by Smith's words, stared at me a moment, then his mouth opened wide in recognition and surprise. "I—I am surely not

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mistaken ! ” he exclaimed, advancing a step, while the colour rose in his sallow face. “ It is—it—surely—is——”

“ Sir John,” Smith cried, in haste, and he, too, advanced a step and raised a hand in warning—“ this is Colonel Talbot ! Colonel Talbot, mark you, sir ; I am sure you understand me, and the reasons which make it impossible for any but Colonel Talbot to visit you here. He has done me the honour to accompany me. But, perhaps,” he continued, checking himself, and bowing with an air of deference, “ it were more fitting I left you now.”

“ No,” I said, hurriedly, repeating the lesson I had learned by rote, and in which Smith had not failed to practise me a dozen times that day. “ I am here to one end only—to ask Sir John Fenwick to do Colonel Talbot a favour : to take this ring and convey it with my service and duty whither he is going.”

Sir John lifted his hands and eyes in a kind of ecstasy

“ Oh, but this is extraordinary ! ” he cried. “ This is a dispensation ! A providence ! Yet, my lord,” he continued with rapture, “ there is one more step you may take, one more effort you may make. Be the restorer, the Monk of this generation ! I tell you, so ripe is the pear, were you to ride through the City to-morrow, and proclaim our rightful sovereign, not a citizen but would bless you, not a soldier but would throw down his pike ! The Blues are with us to a man, and enraged at Keyes’s execution. And the rest of the army—do you mean that they see Dutch colonels promoted and Dutch soldiers overpaid, and do not resent it ? I tell you, my lord—your Grace, I should say, for doubtless the King will confirm it——”

“ Sir John,” I cried in haste, assuming an anger I did not feel. “ You mistake me. I am Colonel Talbot and no other. And I am here not to listen to plans or make suggestions, but to request a favour at your hands. Be good enough to convey that ring with my service whither you are going.”

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"And that is all?" he cried reproachfully.

"That is all."

"You will say no more?"

"No more, sir," I answered, and then, catching Smith's eye, I added, "Save this—you may add that, when the time comes, I shall know what to do, and I shall do it."

This time, sobered by my words and manner, he took in silence the ring I proffered; but, having glanced at it, could not refrain from a second burst of rapture and jubilation, more selfish and personal than the first, yet not less hearty. "This will be the best news Lord Middleton has had for a twelve-month!" he cried; "and that I should succeed where I am told that he failed! 'Gad! I am the proudest man in England, your Grace—Colonel Talbot, I mean. We will pound Melfort and his faction with this! We will pound them to powder! He has wasted half a million and not got such an adherent! Good Lord! I shall not rest now until I am across with the news."

"Nor I—until Colonel Talbot is on the road again," said Smith, intervening deftly. "At the best this is not a safe place for him."

"It is true," said Sir John, with ready consideration. "But someone must run risks, and I shall be riding within the half-hour, but to Romney. You, I suppose, return to London?"

"To London," I said, mechanically.

"Direct?" said he.

"As directly as we dare," Smith answered, and with the word moved to the door and opened it. On that I bowed and was for going out, perhaps with a little awkwardness. But Sir John, too deeply impressed by the honour I had done him to let me retire so lamely, started forward, and snatching up a candle, would hold the door and light me, bending his long back, and calling to Brown to look to us—to look to us! Nor was this all; for when I halted half-way down the stairs, and turned, feeling that such courtesy demanded some acknowledgment or at least a word of thanks, he took the word out of my mouth.

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"Hist! Colonel Talbot!" he cried in a loud whisper; and leaning far over the stairs he held the light high with one hand and shaded his eyes with the other. "You know that we have the Tower?"

"The Tower?" I said, not understanding him.

"To be sure. Ailesbury has it in his hand. It will declare for us whenever he gets the word. However—you know it from him, I suppose?"

"From Lord Ailesbury?" I exclaimed in sheer surprise. "But he is a prisoner—in the Tower!"

Sir John winked. "Prisoner and master!" he said, nodding mysteriously. "But there, I must not keep you. Good luck and *bon voyage*—M. le Duc."

Which was the last I saw of him for that time; nor did I ever see him again save on one occasion. That he was a violent and factious man, and a foe to the Protestant succession, I do not deny; nor that some passages in his life do him little credit, and the most bruited the least. But for all this, and though I was a stranger to him, I am fain to confess that as I stumbled down the stairs, and left the poor misguided gentleman, alone in his mean room—left him to pack up those plans for the extension of the house that would never again own a Fenwick for its master, and so to set out on his dark journey—I felt as much pity for him as I felt loathing for the trickster who employed me. And so far was this carried, and so much influence had it with me, that when we reached the room below and—the landlord having left us to see to the horses—Smith in his joy at our success clapped me on the shoulder, I shrank from his hand as if it burned me, shrank, and burst into childish tears of rage.

Naturally, he was unable to comprehend me, and stared at me in astonishment. "Why, man," he cried, "what is the matter? What ails you?"

"You!" I said. "You, curse you!" and flung from him.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

DOUBTLESS it was this outbreak, or rather the suspicion of me which it sowed in Smith's mind, that occasioned the sequel of our adventure; for when he had cursed me for a fool and had put on his cloak, being now ready to go out, he seemed to be in two minds about it, as if he dared neither leave me where I was, lest I should communicate with Sir John, nor take me with him on his immediate errand. More than once he went to the door, and, eyeing me askance and sourly, came back; but in the end, and after standing a while irresolute, biting his nails, he made up his mind, and bade me follow him.

"Do you think that I am to saddle for you, you whelp?" he cried savagely. "Be stirring! and have a care, or I shall bore that hole in you yet. Take that bag and go before me. By G——, I wish you were at the bottom of the nearest horse-pond!"

His words had the effect he intended, of bringing me to my senses; but they went farther. In proportion as they cooled my temper they awakened my fears; and though I obeyed him abjectly, took up my bag and followed him, it was with a sudden and horrible distrust of his purpose. I saw that I had not only ceased to be of use to him, but was now in his way—that I might be a danger to him. And the night—which enveloped us the moment we crossed the threshold, and seemed the more dreary for the ruddy light and comfort we left behind us—reminding me of the long dark miles I must ride by his side, each mile a terror to one and an opportunity to the other, I had much ado not to give way to panic there and then. However, for the time I controlled myself, and stumbling across the gloomy yard to the spot where a faint gleam of light indicated the door of the stables, I went in.

The landlord was saddling our horses, and, a little cheered by the warmth of his lanthorn, I went to help him. Smith turned aside, as I thought into the

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next stall. But Brown was sharper and more suspicious, and in a twinkling called lustily to him to know what he was doing. Getting no answer, "Devil take him!" the landlord cried. "He cannot keep from that horse! Here, you! What are you doing there?"

"Coming!" Smith answered; but even as he spoke I caught the smart click of iron on iron, and the horse in the distant stall moved sharply with a clatter of hoofs on the stones. "Coming!" Smith repeated. "What is the matter with you, man?"

"You had better come," the landlord answered, with savage meaning. "Or I will fetch you. Here you!"—this to me—"lead yours out, will you? I want to see your backs, and be quit of you!"

I took my horse by the bridle, and led it out of the stable, while Brown went to bit the other. So being alone outside, and the moon rising over the roof of the house and showing me the open gates at the end of the yard, the impulse to escape from Smith while I had the opportunity came on me with overpowering force. Better acquainted than the landlord with the villain's plans, I had not a doubt that at that moment he was laming Sir John's horse for the purpose of detaining him, and the cold-blooded treachery of the act moving me to as much terror on my own account—who might be the next victim—as hatred of the perpetrator, I climbed softly to my saddle, and began to walk my horse towards the gates. Doubtless Smith was too busy cloaking his own movements to be observant of mine. I reached the gates unnoticed, and, turning instinctively from London—in which direction I fancied that he would be sure to pursue me—I kicked my mare first into a quick walk, then into a cautious trot, finally into a canter. The beast, though far from speedy, was fresh from its corn; it took hold of the bit, shied at a chance light in a cotter's window, and, pricking its ears, dashed into a gallop. In a minute we had left Ashford behind us, and were fleeing through the moonlight. With one hand on the pommel and the other holding the shortened reins,

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I urged the mare on with all the pressure of my legs; and albeit I trembled, now at some late-seen obstacle, which proved to be only the shadow of a tree thrown across the road, and now at the steepness of a descent that gaped before me, I never faltered, but up hill and down hill drove in my heels, and with fear behind me, rode in the night as I had never before dared to ride in the daylight.

I had known nothing like it since the summer day twelve years before when I fled across the Hertfordshire meadows on my feet. The sweat ran down me, and I stooped in the saddle out of weakness; if the horse pricked its ears forward, I spread mine backward listening for sounds of pursuit. But such a speed could not be maintained, and when we had gone as I judged two miles, the mare began to flag, and the gallop became a trot. Still for another mile I urged her on; until, feeling her labour under me, and foreseeing that I must ride far, I had the thought to turn into the first lane to which I came, and there wait in the shadow of a tree until Smith, if he followed, should have passed.

I did this, sprang down, and standing by my panting horse in a dark hollow some two hundred paces from the road, listened intently—for twenty minutes, it may be, but they seemed to me to be hours. After the life I had been leading in London, this loneliness in the night in a strange and wild place, and with a relentless enemy on my track, appalled my very soul. I was hot and yet I shivered, and started at the least sound. The scream of a curlew daunted me, the whispering of the rushes and sedge shook me; when a sad wail, as of a multitude of lost souls, passed over head, I cowered almost to my knees. Yet, inasmuch as these sounds, doleful and dreary as they were, were all I heard, and the night air brought no beat of following hoofs to my ear, I had reason to be thankful, and more than thankful, and, my mare having got her wind again, I led her back to the road, climbed into the saddle and plodded on steadily, deriving a wonderful relief and confidence

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from the thought that Smith had followed me Londonwards.

Moreover, I had conceived a sort of horror of the loneliness of the waste country-side; and to keep the highway was willing to run some risk. I took it that the road I travelled must bring me to Romney, and for a good hour and a half I jogged with a loose rein through the gloom, the way becoming ever flatter and wetter, the wind more chill and salt, and the night darker, the moon being constantly overcast by clouds. In that marshy district are few hamlets or farms, and those of the smallest, and very sparsely scattered. Once or twice I heard the bark of a distant sheep-dog, and once far to the left I saw a tiny light, and had the idea of making for it. But the reflection that a dozen great ditches, each wide enough and deep enough to smother my horse, might lie between me and the house availed to keep me 'n the road; the more as I now felt sure from the saltiness of the air that Romney and the sea were at no great distance in front of me. Presently, indeed, I made out two moving lights in front that I took to be those of ships riding at anchor, and my weary mare quickened her pace as if she smelled the stable and the hay-rack.

For five minutes after that I plodded on in the happy belief that my journey was over, and I saved; and I let my mind dwell on shelter and safety, and a bed and food and the like, all awaiting me, as I fancied, in the patch of low gloom where my fancy pictured the sleeping town. Then on a sudden my ear caught the dull beat of a horse's hoofs on the road behind me, and, my heart standing still, I plucked at my reins, and stood to listen. It was no fancy, a moment satisfied me of that. Thud-thud, thud-thud, and then squash-squash, squish-squish! a horse was coming up behind me, and not only behind me, but hard upon me—within less than a hundred paces of me. I caught the click-clack of a loose shoe that Smith's horse had—the soft wet road had smothered the sound up to the last moment.

The rider was so close to me in truth, and I was so

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far taken by surprise, that the moon, sailing at that instant into a clear sky, showed me to him before I could set my horse going; and, as I started, whipping and spurring desperately, I heard the man shout. That was enough for me; lunging recklessly forward along the wet, boggy road, I flogged my horse into a jaded canter, and, leaning low in the saddle in mortal fear of a bullet, closed my eyes to the dangers that lay ahead, and thought only of escape from that which followed on my heels.

Suddenly, while I was still kicking and urging on my horse, before the first flush of fear had left me, I heard a crash and a cry behind; but I did not dare at the moment to look back. I only leaned the lower, and clung the more tightly to my horse's mane, and still pressed on. By and bye, hearing nothing, it flashed on me that I was riding alone, that I was no longer pursued; and a little later, taking courage to draw rein and look back, I found that I could see nothing and hear no sound save the heavy panting of my horse.

I had escaped. I had escaped and was alone on the marsh; but, as I soon learned I was no longer on the causeway along which I had been travelling when the man surprised me. The wind, which then had met me, was now on my right cheek; the lights for which I had been heading were no longer in sight. The track, too, when I moved forward, seemed more wet and rough; it needed no more to convince me that I had strayed from the highway, probably at the point where my pursuer had fallen.

This, since I dared not return by the way I had come, terribly perplexed me. I dismounted, and, wet and shivering, stood by my horse, which hung its head, and restlessly lifted his feet as if it already felt the engulfing power of the moss. Peering every way I saw nothing but gloom and mist covering the dark waste and unknown depths of the marsh. It was a situation to try the stoutest; nor did it need the mournful sough of the wind as it swept the flats, or the strange gurgling noises that from time to time rose

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from the sloughs about me, to add the last touch of fear and melancholy to the scene.

Though, for my part, I sank in no farther than my ankles, the horse by its restlessness evinced a strong sense of danger, and I dared not stand still. But, as clouds had again obscured the moon and the darkness was absolute, to advance seemed as dangerous as to remain. However, in fear that the horse, if I stood where I was, would break loose, I led it forward cautiously, and then, the track growing no worse but rather better, and the beast seeming to gain confidence as it proceeded, I took courage to remount again, and, dropping the reins, allowed it to carry me whither it would. This it did slowly and with infinite caution, smelling rather than feeling the way, and often stopping to try a doubtful spot. Observing how wonderfully the instinct of the beast aided it, and remembering that I had been told that horses feared nothing so much as to be smooored (as the fenmen call it), and would not willingly run that risk, I gained confidence myself; which the event justified, for by and bye I caught the heavy sound of waves booming on a beach, and a few minutes afterwards discerned in the sky before me the first streaks of dawn.

Heaven knows how welcome it was to me! I was wet, weary, and shivering with cold and with the aguish air of that dreary place; which is so unwholesome that I am told the natives, to stave off the fever, take drugs as others do ale and wine. But at the sight I pricked up, and the horse too, and we moved on briskly. Presently, by the help of the growing light, and through a mist which trebled the size of all objects, I saw a huge wall or bank loom across my path. I was close to it when I discerned it, and I had no more than time to despair of surmounting it before the horse was already clambering up it. Scrambling and slipping among the stones, in a minute or so and with a great clatter we gained the summit and saw below and before us the smooth milky surface of the sea lifting lazily under the fog.

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So seen, it had a strangely weird and pallid aspect, as of a dead sea viewed in dreams; and I stood a moment to breathe my horse and admire the spectacle, nor did I fail to thank God that I was out of that dreary and treacherous place. Then, considering my future movements and not knowing which way I ought to take—to right or left along the beach—to gain the more quickly help and shelter, I was reining my mare down the sea-side of the bank when a welcome sound caught my ear. It was a man's voice giving an order. I halted and peered through the sea-mist, and by and bye I made out a boat, lying beached at the edge of the tide, some hundred and fifty yards to my left. There were men standing in it, I could not see how many, and more were in the act of pushing it off the strand. Their voices came to me with singular clearness, but the words were unintelligible.

The sight gave me pause, and for a moment I stood reconnoitring the men. To advance or not was the question, and I was still debating it, and striving to deduce a clue from the men's appearance, when something, I never knew what—perhaps some noise ill-apprehended—led me to turn my head. Whatever the cause of the movement, it apprised me of something little suspected. Not fifty paces behind me I saw the figure of a second horseman looming through the mist. He was advancing along the summit of the sea-wall below which I stood; hence I saw him before he made me out; and this gave me the start and the advantage. I had time to take in the thing, and seize my horse by the head, and move eight to ten paces towards the boat before he took the cue. Then on neither side was there any concealment. With a cry of recognition, the sound of which flung me into a panic, the man urged his horse down the bank shouting to me to stand; I, in utter terror, spurred mine across the beach towards the men I had seen.

I have said that I had some sixty yards of start, and two hundred or less to cross, to reach the boat;

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but the horses were scarcely able to trot, a yard was a furlong, and the sand swallowing up the sound of hoofs, it was a veritable race of ghosts, of phantoms, labouring through the mist, with the oily Stygian sea lapping the shore behind us. He cried out in the most violent fashion, now bidding me stay and now bidding the men to stay. For all I knew they might be in his pay, or be some of the reckless desperadoes who on that coast live by owling and smuggling, and worse practices. But they were my only hope, and I too cried to them, and with joy saw them put in again—they had before got afloat.

Believing Smith to be gaining on me, I cried pitifully to them to save me; and then, my horse stumbling, I flung myself from the saddle and plunged through the sand on my feet. Two sprang out to meet me and caught me under my arms; and in a moment, amid a jargon of cries in a foreign tongue, they whipped me over the side into the boat. They pushed it off and leaped in themselves, wet to the thighs; and as my pursuer came lurching down the beach, a pistol drawn in his hand, a couple of powerful strokes drove the boat through the light surf. Waving frantically he yelled to the men to wait, and rode to his boot-soles into the water; but with a jeering laugh and a volley of foreign words the sailors pulled the faster and the faster, and, the mist lying thick on the water, and the boat sitting low, in half a minute we lost the last glimpse of him and his passion, and rode outward on a grey, boundless sea.

CHAPTER XXXIX

I SHOULD have been less than a man had I not thanked God for my escape. But it is in the sap of a tree to run upward in the spring, and in the blood of a man to live in the present and future, the past going for little, and I had not crouched two minutes on the thwart before the steady lurch of the boat outward and seaward fixed my attention.

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From this to asking myself by what chance I had been saved, and who were the men who sat round me—and evinced no more curiosity about me than if they had been sent to the spot purely and simply to rescue me—was but a step.

I took it, scanned them stealthily, and was far from reassured; the sea-garb was then new to me, and these wearers of it were the wildest of their class. The fog which enfolded us magnified their clumsy shoulders and great knitted night-caps and the tarry ringlets that hung in festoons round their scarred and tanned faces. The huge gnarled hands that swung to and fro with the oars were no more like human flesh than the sea-boots which the men wore, drawn high on their thighs. They had rings in their ears, and from all came a reek of tobacco, and salt fish, and strange oaths; nor did it need the addition of the hanger and pistol which each wore in his belt to tell me that I had fallen among fierce and desperate men.

Dismayed by these signs, it surprised me that no one questioned me. He who sat in the stern of the boat, and seemed to be in command, had a whistle continually at his lips, and his eyes on the curtain of haze before us; but if the tiller took up his thoughts there were others. These, however, were content to pull on in silence, eyeing me with dull, brutish stares; until the fog lifting disclosed the hull of a tall ship looming high beside us. A shrill piping came from it—a sound I had heard before, but taken to be the scream of a sea-bird, and this, as we drew up, was followed by a hail. The man by my side let his whistle fall that he might answer—which he did in French. A moment later our boat grated against the heaving timbers, and, looking up through the raw morning air, I saw a man in a boat-cloak spring on the bulwarks and wave his hat.

"Welcome!" he cried, lustily. "And God save the King! A near thing they tell me, sir. But come on board, come on board, and we shall see Dunquerque the sooner. Up with you, Sir John, if

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you please, and let us be gone with the fog, and no heel-taps ! ”

Then I knew what had happened ; I knew why the boat which had picked me up had been waiting on the beach at that hour ; and as I rose to my feet on the seat, and clutched the rope-ladder which the sailors threw down to me, my knees knocked together ; I foresaw what I had to expect. But the deck was surer ground for debate or explanation than the cockle-shell wherein I sat, and which tossed and ducked under me, threatening every moment to upset my stomach ; and I went up giddily, grasped the bulwark, and, aided by half a dozen grinning seamen, night-capped and ringleted, I slid down on the deck.

The man in the boat-cloak received me with a clumsy bow, and shook my hand. “ Give you joy, Sir John ! ” he said. “ Glad to see you, sir. I began to fear that you were taken ! A little more, and I must have left you. But all’s well that ends well, and—your pardon one moment.”

With the word he broke off, and shouted half a dozen orders in French and English to the sailors, and in a trice the capstan, as I afterwards heard it called, was creaking, and there was a hurry of feet, first to one side and then to the other, and a great shouting and a hauling at ropes. The ship heeled over so suddenly that if I had not caught at the rail I must have lost my footing, and for an instant the green seas swelled up on a level with the slanting deck as if they would swallow us bodily. Instead, the sloop, still heeling over, began to gather way, and presently was hissing through the water, piling the white surf before it, only to pour it foaming to either side. The haze, like a moving curtain, began to glide by us ; and looking ahead I saw a yellow glare that told of the sun rising over the French dunes.

The man who had received me, and who seemed to be the master, returned to my side. “ Now we are under way, sir,” he said, “ and I am glad of it. But

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you will like to see Mr. Birkenhead? He would have met you, but the sea-colic took him as he lay on the swell outside Dunquerque whistling for a wind. He gets it badly one time, and one time he is as hearty as you are. He is better this morning, but he is ill enough."

I muttered that I would see him by and bye, when he was better. That I would lie down a little, and——

"Oh! I have got a bunk for you in his cabin," the master answered briskly. "I thought you would want to talk State secrets. Follow me, if you please, and look to your sea-legs, sir."

He led the way to a hatch or trap-door, and raising it began to descend. Reluctant, but afraid to refuse, I followed him down a steep ladder into the dark bowels of the ship, the reek of tar and bilge-water, cheese and old rum, growing stronger with every foot we descended. At the bottom of the ladder he pushed aside a sliding panel, and signed me to pass through the opening. I obeyed, and found myself in a sort of dog-hole—as it seemed to me who knew nothing of ships' cabins—lighted only by a span-wide window, so dark, therefore, that I stood a moment groping, and so close and foul-smelling that my gorge rose.

Out of the gloom came a groan as of a sick sheep. "Here is Sir John, safe and sound!" cried the master in his sea tones. "There is good medicine for you, Mr. Birkenhead." And he peered into the darkness.

The only answer was a second groan.

"Do you hear, sir?" the captain repeated. "Sir John is here."

A voice feebly, yet unmistakably, d——d Sir John and the captain.

The master chuckled hoarsely. "Set a frigate behind us with a noose at the yard-arm, and there is no man like him!" he said. "None, Sir John; and I have carried him across seventy times sick and well. He should know the road from the Marsh to Southwark if any man does. But let him be for the present, and do you lie down in the bunk above him,

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and I will bring you some Nantz and a crust. When he is better he will be as glad to see you as if you were his brother."

I obeyed, and, fortified by the strong waters he brought me, was glad to lie down, and under cover of darkness consider my position and what chance I had of extricating myself. For the time, and probably until we reached Dunquerque, I was safe; but what would happen when Birkenhead—the man whom the Jacobites called the Royal Post, and who doubtless knew Sir John Fenwick by sight—what would happen when he roused himself and found that he had not only taken off the wrong man but left Sir John to his fate? Would he not be certain to visit the mischance on my head? Or if I escaped his hands, what had I to expect, a stranger, in a foreign land, with little money, and no language at my command? I shuddered at the prospect, yet shuddered more at the thought of Birkenhead's anger; so that presently all my forelooking resolved itself into a strenuous effort to put off the evil day, and prolong by my own stillness the sleep into which he had fallen.

He lay so close to me, divided only by the one board on which I reclined, that all the noises of the ship—the creaking of the timbers, the wash of the seas as they foamed along the quarter, and the banging of blocks and ropes—noises that never ceased, failed to cover the sound of his breathing. And this nearness to me, taken with the fact that I could not see him, so tormented me with doubt whether he was awake or asleep, was recovering or growing worse, that more than once I raised my head and listened until my neck ached. In the twilight of the cabin I could see his cloak swaying lazily on a hook, and on another a belt with pistols, that slid this way and that with the swing of the vessel. And presently, watching these and listening to the regularity of his breathing, I laid my head down and did the last thing I proposed to do or had thought possible, for I fell asleep.

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I awoke with a man's hand on my shoulder, and a man's voice in my ear. I sat up with a start of alarm. The floor of the cabin no longer slanted, the cloak and sword-belt hung motionless on the wall; and in place of the sullen plash of the waves and the ceaseless creaking of joists and knees, that had before filled the inwards of the ship, a medley of shouts and cries, as shrill as they were rhythmical, filled the pauses of the windlass. These things showed, and I took them in and drew the inference, that we were in harbour; but mechanically, for it seemed, at the moment, that such wits as terror left me were in the grasp of the man who shook me and swore at me by turns, and whose short hair—for he was wigless—fairly bristled with rage and perplexity.

"You! Who the devil are *you*?" he cried frantically. "What witchcraft is this? And who put you here? Here, Gill! Gill! Do you hear, you tarry pudding-head? Who is this you have put in my cabin? And where is Fenwick? Where——"

"Where is Sir John?" cried a voice somewhat distant, as if the speaker stepped to the hatchway. "He is there, Mr. Birkenhead. I set him there myself. And between gentlemen, such words as those, Mr. Birkenhead——"

"As what?" cried the man who held me. And he shook me anew.

"As tarry pudding—— But never mind; between friends——"

"Friends be hanged!" cried my assailant with violence. "Who is this fool you have put here? That is what I asked. And you, have you no tongue?" he continued, glaring at me. "Who are you, and where is Sir John Fenwick?"

Before I could answer, the master, who had descended, crowded himself into the doorway. "That is Sir John," he said, sulkily. "I thought that you knew him."

"This Sir John?" the other exclaimed.

"Ay, to be sure."

"As much Sir John as you are the warming-pan!"

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Birkenhead retorted; and released me with so much violence that my head rapped against the panels. "This Sir John Fenwick?" And then, "Oh, man, man, you have destroyed me!" he cried. "Where is my reputation now? You have left the real Simon Pure to be taken, and brought off this—this—you booby! you grinning ape! Who are you?"

Trembling, I told him my name.

"I left him at Ashford," I muttered.

"It is a lie!" he cried, in a voice that thrilled me to the marrow. "You did not leave him at Ashford! He was with you on the beach—he was with you and you deserted him! You left him to be taken, and saved yourself. You wretch! You Judas!"

God knows by what intuition he spoke. For me, I swear that it was not until then, not until he had put the possibility into words that I knew—ay, knew, for that was the only word, so certain was I after the event—that the man who had ridden down the beach and called on the sailors to wait, the man from whom we had rowed away laughing, taking with us his last hope of life, was not Matthew Smith, but Sir John Fenwick! *Now* things which should have opened my eyes then, and had not, came back to me. I recalled how tall and gaunt the rider had looked through the haze, and a something novel in his voice, and plaintive in his tone. True, I had heard the click-clack of Smith's horse's shoes as clearly as I ever heard anything in my life; but if Sir John, alarmed by the sound of my hasty departure, and fearing treachery, had sallied out, and leaping on the first horse he found, had ridden after me, then all was clear!

I saw this, and cowered before the men's accusing eyes; so that they had been more than Solomons had they taken my sudden disorder for aught but guilt—guilt brought home. For Birkenhead, his rage was terrible. He seized me by the throat, and, disregarding my pitiful pleas that I had not known, I had not known, he dragged me from the berth, and made as if he would choke me with his naked hands.

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Instead, however, he suddenly loosed me. "Faugh," he cried; "I will not dirty my hands with you! That such as you—you should be a man's death! You! But you shall not escape. Gill, up with him! Up with him, and to the yard-arm. String him up!" he continued in stern excitement. "He shall swing before he is an hour older."

"In Dunquerque harbour?" said the other, coolly.

"Why not?"

"Why not?" retorted the master. "Because, Mr. Birkenhead, I serve a King *de jure* and not *de facto*. That is why not. And if you want another reason——"

"Well?"

"I am not aware that His Majesty has raised you to the Bench," the master answered sturdily.

"Oh, you have turned sea-lawyer, have you?"

"Law is law," said the ship master, obstinately. "All the world over—England, or France, or the high seas."

"And owling is owling!" the other retorted with passion. "And smuggling smuggling! You are a fine man to talk about laws! If you will not hang him—as they will hang Fenwick, so help me, never doubt it!—what will you do with him?"

"Give my men a bag of sand apiece, and let him run the gauntlet," the captain answered, with a phlegm that froze me. "Trust me, sir, they will not leave much of a balance owing. If I were the poor devil I would as soon hang."

It was terrible to see how Birkenhead, vain, choleric, and maddened by disappointment, jumped at the cruel suggestion. For me, I shrank into the bunk, into the farthest corner, and cried for mercy; I might as well have cried to the winds. I was hauled out, the word passed up, and despite my desperate struggles, prayers, and threats—the latter not unmingled with the name of Shrewsbury, which did but harden them—I was dragged to the foot of the ladder. Thence I was carried on deck, where,

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half dead with fear, and powerless in the hands of three stout seamen, I met none but grinning faces and looks of cruel anticipation.

Few need to be told with what zest the common herd flock to a scene of cruel sport; how hard are their bosoms, how fiendish the pleasure which all but the most humane and thoughtful take in helpless suffering. Small was the chance that my pleas of innocence and appeals for a hearing would gain attention. All was soon ready, the men bared their arms and licked their lips, and in a moment I must have been set free for the baiting.

But in certain circumstances the extremity of fear is another name for the extremity of daring, and, the master, at this last moment going to range the crew in two lines, and one of the sailors who had me in charge releasing me for an instant, that he might arm himself with a sand-bag, I saw my opportunity. With a desperate swing I wrenched myself from the grasp of the other man. That done, a single bound carried me to the plank which joined the deck to the shore. I flew across it, swift as the wind, and as the whole crew, seeing what had happened, broke from their stations, and with yells and whoops of glee took up the chase, I sprang on shore. Bursting recklessly through the fringe of idlers whom the arrival of the ship had brought to the water's edge, I sped across the open wharf, threaded a labyrinth of bales and casks, and darted up the first lane to which I came.

Fear gave me wings, and I left the wharf a score of yards ahead of my pursuers. But the seamen, who had taken up the chase with the gusto of boys let loose from school, made up for the lack of speed by whooping like demons, and the English among them halloing "Stop thief!" and the others some French words alike in import, the alarm went abreast of me. Fortunately the lane was almost deserted, and I evaded the half-hearted efforts to stop me which one or two made. It seemed that I should get away. But at the last moment, at the head of the long lane, Fate waited for me. An old woman standing in a

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doorway, and who made, as I came up, as if she was going in in fear of me, flung a bucket after me. It fell in front of me. I trod on the edge, and fell with a shriek of pain.

Before I could rise or speak, the foremost of the sailors came up and struck me on the head with a sand-bag, and the others as they arrived rained blows on me without mercy. I contrived to utter a cry, then instinctively covered my head with my arms. They belaboured me until they were tired and I almost senseless, when, thinking me dead, they went off whistling, and I crawled into the nearest doorway and fainted away.

CHAPTER XL

WHEN I recovered my senses I was on my back in one of eighteen beds in a long white-walled room, having barred windows and a vaulted ceiling. A woman, garbed strangely in black, and with a queer white cap drawn tight round her face, leaned over me, and, with her finger laid to her lips, enjoined silence. Here and there along the wall were pictures of saints, and at the end two candles burned before a kind of altar. I had an idea that I had been partly conscious, and had lain tossing giddily with a burning head and a dreadful thirst through days and nights of fever. Now, though I could scarcely raise my head, and my brain reeled if I stirred, I was clear minded, and knew that the bone of my leg was broken, and that for that reason I had a bed to myself, where most lay double. For the rest I was so weak I could only cry in pure gratitude when the nun came to me in my turn, and fed me; and plain, stout, and gentle-eyed, laid her fingers on her lips, or, smiling, said in her odd English, "Quee-at, quee-at, monsieur!"

In face of the blessings which the Protestant Succession, as settled in our present House of Hanover, has secured to these islands, it would ill become me to find a virtue in papistry; and my late lord, who

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early saw and abjured the errors of that faith, would have been the last to support or encourage such a thesis. Notwithstanding which I venture to say that the devotion of these women to their calling is a thing not to be decried merely because we have no counterpart of it; nor the charity of that hospital, simply because the burning of candles and worshipping of saints alternate with the tendance of the wretched. On the contrary, it seems to me that were such a profession, the idolatrous vows excepted, grafted on our Church it might redound alike to the credit of religion—which of late the writings of Lord Bolingbroke have somewhat belittled—and to the good of mankind.

So much with submission; nor will the most rigid of our divines blame me for these words when they learn that I lay ten weeks in the *Maison de Dieu* at Dunquerque, dependent for everything on the kind offices of those good women; and nursed during that long period with a solicitude and patience not to be exceeded by that of wife or mother. When I had so far recovered as to be able to leave my bed, and move a few yards on crutches, I was assisted to a shady courtyard, nestled snugly between the hospital and the old town wall. Here, under a gnarled mulberry tree which had sheltered the troops of Parma, I spent my time in a dream of peace; through which nuns, apple-faced and kind-eyed, flitted with tisanes, or bearing bottles that called for the immediate attention of *M. le Médecin's* long nose and silver-rimmed spectacles. Occasionally their Director would seat himself beside me, and silently run through his office; or instruct me in the French tongue, and the evils of Jansenism—mainly by means of the snuff-box which rarely left his fine white hands. More often the meagre apothecary, young, yellow, dry, and ambitious, with a hungry light in his eyes, would take an English lesson, until the coming of his superior routed him and sent him to his gallipots and compounding, with a flea in his ear.

Such were the scenes and companions that attended

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my return to health; nor, my spirits being attuned to these, should I have readily sought or desired others, though enhanced by my native air—a species of inertia, more easily excused by those who have viewed French life near at hand, than by such as have never travelled—but for an encounter, as important in its consequences as it was unexpected, which presently broke the even current of my days.

It was no uncommon thing for the nuns to bring one of my countrymen to me, in the fond hope that I should find a friend. But as these visitors, from the nature of the case, were invariably Jacobites, and either knowing something of my story thought me well served, or, coming to examine me, shied at the names of Mr. Brome and Lord Shrewsbury, such efforts had but one end. When I heard, therefore, for the fourth or fifth time that a compatriot of mine, amiable and of a vivacity *tout a fait merveilleuse*, was coming to see me, I was as far from supposing that I should find an acquaintance as I was from anticipating the interview with pleasure. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when—*Sœur Marie* having called me at the appointed time, and led me, her simple face shining with delight, to the old mulberry tree—who should I find sitting there but Mary Ferguson!

She had as little expected to meet me as I to meet her, and coming on me thus suddenly, and seeing me lame, and a cripple, reduced, moreover, to a shadow by the long illness through which I had passed, she let her feelings have way. The tenderness which she had entertained for me before welled up now with irresistible force, and giving the lie to a certain hoydenish hardness, inherent in a disposition which was never one of the most common, in a moment she was in my arms. If she did not weep herself, she pardoned, and perhaps viewed with pleasure the tears which weakness and surprise drew from me; while a hundred broken words and exclamations bore witness to the gratitude she felt on the score of her escape.

Thus brought together, in a strange country, and

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agitated by a hundred memories, nothing was at first made clear, except that we belonged to one another; and Sœur Marie had long fled to carry the tale, with mingled glee and horror, to the sisters before we grew sufficiently calm to answer the numberless questions which it occurred to each to ask.

At length Mary, pressed to tell me how she had fared since her escape, made one of the odd faces I could so well remember. And "Not as I would, but as I could," she said, drily. "By crossing with letters, my lad."

"Crossing?" I exclaimed.

"To be sure," she answered. "I go to and from London with letters."

"But should you be taken?" I cried, with a vivid remembrance of the terror into which the prospect of punishment had thrown her.

She shrugged her shoulders; yet suppressed, or I was mistaken, a shudder. Then "What will you?" she said, spreading out her little hands French fashion, and making that odd grimace. "It is the old story. I must live, Dick. And what can a woman do? Will Lady Middleton take me for her children's *gouvernante*? Or Lady Melfort find me a place in her household? I am Ferguson's niece, a backstairs wench of whom no one knows anything. If I were handsome now, *bien*! As I am not—to live I must risk my living."

"You are handsome enough for me!" I cried.

She raised her eyebrows, with a look in her eyes that, I remember, puzzled me. "Well, maybe," she said a trifle tartly. "And the other is neither here nor there. For the rest, Dick, I live at Captain Gill's, and his wife claws me Monday and kisses me Tuesday."

"And you have taken letters to London?" I said, wondering at her courage.

"Three times," she answered, nodding soberly, "and to Tunbridge once. A woman passes. A man would be taken. So Mr. Birkenhead says. But——" and with the word she broke off abruptly, and stared at me; and continued to stare at me, her face, which

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was rounder and more womanly than of old, changing strangely.

It took such a look, indeed, that I glanced over my shoulder thinking that she saw something. Finding nothing, "Mary!" I cried, my alarm continuing. "What is it? What is the matter?"

"Are you the man—who came with Sir John Fenwick to the shore?" she cried, stepping back a pace—she had already risen. "And betrayed him? Dick! Dick, don't say it!" she continued hurriedly, holding out her hands as if she would ward off my words. "Don't say that you are *that* man! I had forgotten—until this moment whom I came to see; who, they said, was here."

Her words stung me, even as her face frightened me. But while I winced, a kind of courage born of indignation and of injustice long endured, came to me, and I answered her with spirit. "No," I said, "I am not that man."

"No?" she cried.

"No!" I said defiantly. "If you mean the man that betrayed Sir John Fenwick. But I will tell you what man I am—if you will listen to me."

"What are you going to tell me?" she answered, the troubled look returning. And then, "Dick, don't lie to me!" she cried on a sudden.

"I have no need," I said. And with that, beginning at the beginning, I told her all the story which is written here, so far as it was not known to her. She listened in silence, standing over me with something of the severity of a judge, until I came to the start from London with Matthew Smith.

There she interrupted me. "One moment," she said in a hard voice; and she fixed me with keen, unfriendly eyes. "You know that Sir John Fenwick was taken two days later, and is in the Tower?"

"I know nothing," I said, holding out my hands and trembling with the excitement of my story and the thought of my sufferings.

"Not even that?"

"Not even that," I said.

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"Nor that within a month he will be tried and executed?"

"No."

"Nor that your master is in peril? You have not heard that Sir John has turned on him and denounced him before the Council."

"No," I said. "How should I?"

"What?" she cried incredulously. "You do not know that with which all England is ringing—though it touches you of all men?"

"How should I?" I said feebly. "Who would tell me here? How should I know it? And for weeks I have been ill."

She nodded. "Go on," she said.

I obeyed. I took up the thread again, told her how we reached Ashford, how I saw Sir John, how I fled, and how I was pursued; finally how I was received on board the boat, and never, until the following day, when Birkenhead flung it in my teeth, guessed that I had forestalled Sir John, and robbed him of his one chance of escape. "For if I had known," I continued warmly, "why should I fly from him! What had I to fear from him? Or what to gain—if Smith with a pistol were not at my heels—by leaving England? Gain?" I continued bitterly, seeing that I had convinced her. "What *did* I gain? This! This!" And I touched my crippled leg.

"Thank God!" she said, with emotion. "Thank God, Dick. But——"

"But what?" I retorted sharply; for in the telling of the story I had come to see more clearly than before how cruelly I had been treated. "But what?"

"Well, just this," she said gently. "Have you not brought it on yourself in a measure? If you had been more—that is, I mean, if you had not been so——"

"So what?" I cried querulously, seeing her hesitate.

"Well, so quick to think that it was Matthew Smith—and a pistol," she answered, smiling rather heartlessly. "That is all."

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"There was a mist," I said.

She laughed in her odd way. "Of course, Dick, there was a mist," she agreed. "And you cannot make bricks without straw. And after all you did make bricks in St. James's Square, and it is not for me to find fault. But there is a thing to be done, and it must be done." With that her lips closed firmly, after a fashion I remembered, and still remember, having seen it a hundred times since that day, and learned to humour it. "One that must be done!" she continued. "You will not leave the duke to be ruined by Matthew Smith? You will not lie here and let those rogues work their will on him? Sir John has denounced him."

"And may denounce me!" I said, aghast at the notion. "May denounce me!" I continued with agitation. "Will denounce me. If it was not the duke who was at Ashford it was I!"

"And who are you?" she retorted, with a look that withered me. "Who will care whether you met Sir John at Ashford or not? King William—call him Dutchman, boor, drunkard, beast—as it's the fashion this side—call him I say what you will—at least he flies at high game, and does not hawk at mice!"

"Mice?"

"Ay, mice!" she answered with a snap of her white teeth—and she looked all over the little vixen she could be. "For what are we? What are we now?" she continued. "Still more, what are we if we leave the duke to his enemies, leave him to be ruined and disgraced, leave him to pay the penalty, while you, the cause of all, lie here—lie safe and snug? For shame, Dick! For shame!" she continued with a thrill in her voice at which the pigeons feeding behind her fluttered up in alarm, and two or three nuns looked out inquisitively.

I had my own thoughts and my own feelings about my lord, as he well knew in after years. I challenge any to say that I lacked either respect or affection for him. But a man's wits move more slowly than a woman's, and the news came on me suddenly. It

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was no great wonder if I could not in a moment stomach the prospect of returning to risk and jeopardy, to the turmoil from which I had been so long freed, and the hazards of a life and death struggle. In the political life of twenty years ago men carried their necks to market. Knowing that I might save the duke and suffer in his place—the fate of many a poor dependent, or might be confronted with Smith, or brought face to face with Ferguson, or perish before I reached London in the net in which my lord's own feet were caught, I foresaw not one but a hundred dangers; and those such as no prudent man could be expected to regard with equanimity, or any but a hare-brained girl would encounter with a light heart.

Still I desired to stand well with her; and I confess that it was with relief I remembered my lameness; and named it to her. Passing over the harshness of her last words, "You are right," I said. "Something should be done. But for me it is impossible at present. I am lame, as you see."

"Lame!" she cried.

"More than lame," I answered—but there was that in her tone which bade me avoid her eyes. "A cripple, Mary."

"No, not a cripple," she answered.

"Yes," I said.

"No, Dick," she answered in a voice low, but so changed, so grave and firm that I winced. "Let us be frank at once. Not a cripple, but a coward."

"I never said I was a soldier," I answered.

"Nor I," she replied, wilfully misunderstanding me. "I said a coward! And a coward I will not marry!"

With that we looked at one another, and I saw that her face was white. "Was it a coward saved your life—in the square?" I muttered at last.

"No," she answered. "But it was a coward played the sneak for Ferguson. And a coward played the rogue for Smith! It was a coward lost Fenwick—because he dared not look behind! And a coward who will now sacrifice his benefactor to save his own

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skin. And *you*—you only know in how many other things you have played the craven. But the rather for that, up—up now, and play the man! You have a chance now! Do this one brave thing, and all will be forgiven. Oh, Dick, Dick!" she continued—and with a sudden blaze in her face she stooped and threw her arms round me, "if you love me, do it! Do it for us both! Do it—or if you cannot, God knows it were better we were hung than married!"

I cannot hope to describe the fervour which she threw into these words, or the effect which they wrought on me, weakened as I was by long illness. In a voice broken by tears I conjured her to give me time—to give me time; a few days in which to consider what I would do.

"Not a day!" she answered, springing from me in fresh excitement, and as if my touch burned her. "I will give you no time. You have had a lifetime, and to what purpose? I will give you no time. Do you give me your word."

"To go to England?"

"Yes."

I was ashake from head to foot, and groaned aloud. In truth if I had known the gallows to be the certain and inevitable end of the road on which I was asked to enter, I could not have been more sorely beset: between rage and fear, and shame of her and desire for her. But while I hung in that misery, she continuing to stand over me, I looked, as it happened, in her face; and I saw that it was no longer hot with anger, but sad and drawn as by a sharp pain. And I gave her my word, trembling and shaking.

"Now," said she, "are you a brave man, and perhaps the bravest."

CHAPTER XLI

THAT the arrest of Sir John Fenwick, reported in London on the 13th of June, was regarded by all parties as an event of the first magnitude, scarce

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exceeded in importance by a victory in Flanders or a defeat in the Mediterranean, is a thing not to be denied at this time of day, when men, still in their prime, can recall the commotion occasioned by it. The private animosity which was believed to exist between Sir John and the King, and which dated, if the gossip of Will's and Garraway's went for anything, not from the slight which he had put upon the late Queen, but from a much earlier period, when he had served under William in Flanders, aroused men's curiosity, and in a sense their pity. As if they were to see here the end of a Greek drama.

Nor, apart from the general interest, which Sir John's birth and family connections, no less than his share in the plot, considerably augmented, was there any faction which could view his arrest with indifference. He had been so deep in the confidence of St. Germain's that were he to make a discovery, not Tories and Jacobites only lay at his mercy; but all that large class among the Whigs who had stooped to palter with James. These, as they were the more culpable, had also more to fear. Trembling at the prospect of a disclosure which must convict them of practices at variance with their most solemn professions, they were supported by none of those sentiments of loyalty, honourable if mistaken, which excused the others; while as each fondly thought his perfidy unknown to his neighbour, and dreaded nothing so much as detection by the rank and file of the party, he found the burden of apprehension weigh the more heavily as he had none to share it with him.

The absence of the King, who was campaigning in Flanders, aggravated the suspense which prevailed so widely for the reasons above, and others, that it is not too much to say that barely four politicians of the first or second rank could be found who were not nearly concerned in the question of Sir John Fenwick's silence. Of these, however, I make bold to say that my lord was one; and though the news that Sir John, who lay in the Tower, had sent for

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the Duke of Devonshire may have excited a passing feeling of jealousy in his mind—since he and not the other duke was the person to whom Sir John might more fitly unbosom himself—I am confident, and had it from his own lips, that at this time he had no notion of any danger threatening himself.

His eyes were opened by the Earl of Marlborough, who, calling upon him one day, ostensibly on business connected with the Princess Anne (to whom the King had been reconciled before his departure), presently went on to name Sir John. From this to the statement made to the Duke of Devonshire, and the rumours of its contents which filled the coffee-houses, was but a step. The earl seemed concerned; the duke, in his innocence, sceptical.

At length the latter spoke out what was in his mind. "To tell you the truth, my lord," he said frankly, "I think it is a mare's-nest. I don't believe that any statement has been made."

The earl looked astonished. "May I ask why?" he said.

"Because, unless I am mistaken," my lord answered smiling, "the duke would have brought it straight to me. And I have heard nothing of it."

"You have not asked the duke?"

"Of course not."

"But—he was with Sir John," the earl persisted. "There is no doubt of that, is there?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, then—is not that in itself strange?"

"I think not. There have always been friendly relations," my lord added, "between the Cavendishes and Sir John."

"Just so," Lord Marlborough answered, taking a pinch of snuff. "But do those relations warrant the Lord Steward in visiting him now?"

The secretary looked a little startled. "Well, I don't know," he said. "But the Duke of Devonshire's patriotism is so perfectly established——"

"That he may steal the horse, while we look over the wall," Lord Marlborough answered, taking him

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up with a smile. "Be that as it may," he continued, "and I am sure that the same may be said of the Duke of Shrewsbury"—here the two noblemen bowed to one another—"I think your Grace's information is somewhat faulty here. I happen to know that immediately after the interview a special messenger left Devonshire House for Loo, and that the matters he carried were reduced into writing by his Grace's own hand. That being so, duke—you are better qualified to draw the inference than I am."

My lord, at that, looked grave, and nodded, being convinced; and I do not doubt that he felt the slight which the other duke's silence implied. But though, of all the men I ever met, he was the most sensitive, he was the last, also, to wear his heart on his sleeve, and not only did he refrain from complaint of his colleague's conduct, but he hastened to dispel by a word the effect of his momentary gravity. "I fancy, then, I can guess what happened," he said, nodding his comprehension. "I expect Sir John made it a term that his discovery should be delivered to the King at first hand—and to no one else."

Lord Marlborough rose. "Duke," he said firmly, "I think it is fair that I should be more frank with you. The reason you give is not the reason they are giving in the coffee-houses—for the Lord Steward's reticence."

"No?" said my lord, with a faint note of scorn in his voice.

"No," said the earl. "On the contrary, they say at Will's—and for the matter of that at the St. James's too—that the statement is kept close because it touched men in power."

"In power?" said my lord, with the same note in his voice. "In the Council, do you mean?"

"Yes; three men."

"Do they name them?"

"Certainly," my Lord Marlborough answered, smiling. "And they join with the three one who is not in power."

"Ah!"

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"Myself."

Nothing could exceed the placid indifference, as natural as it was free from exaggeration, which the Earl contrived to throw into his last word. Yet my lord started, and shuffled in his chair. Knowing something, and suspecting more, aware of the character which his enemies attributed to Lord Marlborough, he would not have been the statesman he was if he had not fancied an ulterior design in an admission not a little embarrassing. He confined himself, therefore, to a polite shrug expressive of incredulity, and to the words "*Credat Judæus.*"

"Just so," said Lord Marlborough, whose erudition was not on a par with the marvellous strategical powers he has since displayed. "What, then, will your grace say—to Ned Russell?"

"The First Lord of the Admiralty? Is *he* named?"

"In the coffee-houses."

"Ah!"

"Lord Godolphin!"

"Impossible!"

"Not so impossible as the fourth," Lord Marlborough answered with a light laugh, in which courtesy, amusement, and a fine perception of the ridiculous were nicely mingled. "Can you not guess, duke?"

But my lord, too prudent to suggest names in that connection, shook his head. "Who could?" he said, raising his eyebrows scornfully. "They might as well name me as some you are mentioning."

Lord Marlborough laughed softly. "My very dear duke," he said, "that is just what they are doing! They do name you. You are the fourth."

I believe that my lord had so little expected the answer that for a space he remained staring at the speaker, in equal surprise and dismay. Then his indignation finding vent: "It is not possible!" he cried. "Even in the coffee-houses! And besides, if your story is true, my lord, the Duke of Devonshire alone knows what Sir John has discovered, and whom he has accused!"

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Lord Marlborough pursed up his lips. "Things get known—strangely," he said. "For instance, the shadow which came between your Grace and His Majesty in '90 probably you supposed it to be known to the King only, or if to any besides, to Portland at most? On the contrary, there was scarce a knot of chatterers at Garraway's but whispered of your dinners with Middleton, and meetings with Montgomery; ay, and watched for the event, and gave the odds on St. Germain's."

The earl spoke in his airiest manner, took snuff *in medio*, and, with a carelessness that none could so well affect, avoided looking at his hearer. Nevertheless the shaft went home. My lord, smitten between the joints of his harness, suffered all that a proud and sensitive man, apprised on a sudden that his dearest secrets were the property of the marketplace, could suffer; and rage dissipating the composure which self-respect would fain have maintained, "My lord, this is going too far!" he gasped. "Who gave your lordship leave to—touch on a matter which concerns only myself?"

"Simply this later matter," the earl answered in a plain, matter-of-fact tone that at once sobered the duke, and seemed to justify his own interference. "If there is anything at all in this rumour—if Sir John has really said anything, I take it that the old gossip is at the bottom of it."

The duke stared before him with a troubled face, and did not answer. To some it might have seemed the most natural course to carry the war into the informant's country, and by a dry question or a pregnant word suggest that at least as good grounds existed for the imputation cast on *him*. But such a line of argument was beneath that dignity which was never long waiting to my lord; and he made no attempt to disturb the other's equanimity or question his triumph. After a time, however, "I beg your lordship's pardon," he said. "I forgot myself and spoke hastily. Pray forgive me. But—he is a most impudent fellow!"

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"A d——d impudent fellow," the earl cried, with more fervour than he had yet exhibited.

"And he is playing an impudent game," my lord continued thoughtfully. "But—a dangerous one."

"As he will find to his cost before he has done!" Lord Marlborough answered. "It is cunningly thought of. If he will save his head he must give up someone. So as he will not give up his friends he will ruin his enemies—if the King is a fool, and can spare us."

"The King is no fool!" said the duke, rather coldly. It was no secret that between William and Lord Marlborough love was not lost.

"Well, that may be a good thing for us!" the earl answered lightly. He had not the reputation even with his friends of setting his feelings before his interest; nor probably in all England was there a man who looked out on the world with a keener eye to benefit by the weaknesses of men and make profit of their strength.

I know that it ill becomes one in my station to carp at the great duke, as men now style him, though of all his greatness, genius, and courage there remains but a poor drivelling childishness, calling every minute for a woman's tendance. And far am I from giving voice or encouragement to the hints of those who, hating him, maintain that in future times things incredibly base will be traced to his door. But truth is truth; that he knew more of the matter now threatening, and stood to lose more by it than my lord, I have little doubt; nor that this being so, the real object of his visit was to ensure the solidity of the assailed phalanx and particularly to make it certain that the secretary, whose weight with the King was exceeded only by his popularity with the party, should not stand aloof from the common hazard.

Having attained this object, so far as it could be attained in a single interview, and finding that the duke, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, continued moody and distraught, he presently took his

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leave. But to my lord's astonishment he was announced again ten minutes later. He re-entered with profuse apologies.

"I went from your Grace's to the Venetian ambassador's on the farther side of the square," he said. "There I heard it confidently stated that Goodman, one of the witnesses against Sir John, has absconded. Have you heard it, duke?"

"No," my lord answered with some dryness. "And I am sure that it is not true."

"You would have heard it?"

"Necessarily."

"Nevertheless, and craving your pardon," the earl answered slowly, "I think that there is something in it. If he has not been induced to go, I fancy from what I hear that he is hesitating."

"Then he must be looked to."

"Yet—were he to go, you see—it would make all the difference—to Sir John," the earl said. "There would be only Porter; and the Act requires two witnesses."

The duke lifted his eyebrows; that two witnesses were required in a case of treason was too trite a statement to call for comment. Then seeing the other's drift, he smiled. "That were to lick the platter, my lord, in order to keep the fingers clean," he said.

Lord Marlborough laughed airily. "Well put," he said, not a whit abashed. "So it would. You are right, duke, as you always are. But I have detained you too long." With which, and another word of apology, he took his leave a second time.

That he left an unhappy man behind him none can doubt who knew the duke's sensitive nature and respect for his great position and dignity. To find that the weakness, venial and casual, of which he had been guilty years before in stooping to listen to Lord Middleton's solicitations—a fault which he had fancied known only to the King, and by him forgiven—to find that this was the property of the public was burden enough; but to learn that on this

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was to be founded a fresh charge, for the proper refutation of which the past must be raked up, was torture intolerable. In a fine sense of the ridiculous my lord excelled any man of his time; he could feather therefore out of his own breast the shafts of evil that would be aimed at the man who, one of the seven to bring over William in '88, had stooped in '89 to listen to the exile! He could see more clearly than any all the inconsistency, all the folly, all the weakness of the course to which he had, not so much committed himself, as been tempted to commit himself. The minister unfaithful, the patriot importuned, were parts in which he saw himself exposed to the town, to the sallies of Tom Brown, and the impertinences of Ned Ward; nay, in proportion as he appreciated the grandeur of honest rebellion, of treason, open and declared, he felt shame for the pettiness of the part he had himself played, a waverer when trusted, and a palterer when in power.

Such reflections weighed on him so heavily that, though one of the proudest and therefore to those below him one of the most courteous and considerate of men, he could scarcely bring himself to face his subordinates when the hour came for him to attend the office. Sir John Trumbull still deferred to him, Mr. Vernon still bowed until the curls of his wig hid his stout red cheeks, the clerks where he came still rose, pale, smug, and submissive, in his honour. But he fancied—quite falsely—something ironical in this respect; he pictured nods and heard words behind his back; and suspecting the talk, which, hushed at his entrance, rose high on his departure, to be at his expense, he underwent a score of martyrdoms before he returned to St. James's Square. Meanwhile the absence of the King aggravated his position; firstly, by depriving him of the only confidant his pride permitted him; secondly, by adding to his troubles the jealousies which invariably attend government by a council. Popularly considered, he was first Minister of the Crown and deepest in the King's confidence. But the knowledge that one of

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his colleagues withheld a matter from him, and was in private communication with William in respect to it, was not rendered less irksome by the suspicion, amounting almost to a certainty, that his own concern in the business was that of a culprit. This it was which first and most intimately touched his dignity; and this it was which at the end of a fortnight of suspense drove him to a desperate resolution. He would broach the matter to the Duke of Devonshire, and learn the best and the worst of it.

Desiring to do this in a manner the least formal, he took occasion to dismiss his coach at the next council meeting, and telling the duke that he wished to mention a matter to him, he begged a seat in his equipage. But whether the Lord Steward foresaw what was coming, and parried the subject discreetly, or my lord's heart failed him, they reached the square, and nothing said, except on general topics. There, my lord's people coming out to receive them, it seemed natural to ask the Duke of Devonshire to enter; but my lord, instead, begged the duke to drive him round and round awhile, and when they were again started—"I have not been well lately," he said—which was true, more than one having commented on his appearance at the council table—"and I wished to tell you that I fear I shall find it necessary to go into the country for a time."

"To Roehampton?" said his companion, after a word or two of regret.

"No, to Eyford."

For a moment his Grace of Devonshire was silent; and my lord without looking at him had the idea that he was startled. At length as the coach went by London House, "I would not do that—just at this time," he said, quietly.

"Why not?" asked my lord.

"Because—well, for one thing, the King's service may suffer."

"That is not your reason!" quoth my lord, stubbornly. "You are thinking of the Fenwick matter."

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Again the other duke delayed his answer; but when he spoke his voice was both kind and earnest. "Frankly, I am," he said. "If you know so much, duke, you know that it would have an ill appearance."

"How?" said my lord. "Let me tell you that all Sir John knows or can know, the King knows—and has known for some years."

This time there was no doubt that the Lord Steward was startled. "You cannot mean it, duke," he said, in a constrained voice, and with a gesture of reproach. "You cannot mean—that it was with His Majesty's knowledge you had a meeting with Sir John, he being outlawed at the time and under ban? That were to make His Majesty at best an abettor of treason; and at worst a viler thing! For Heaven's sake think! To incite to treason and then to persecute the traitor—but it is impossible!"

"I have not the least notion what your Grace means," my lord said, in a freezing tone. "What is this folly about a meeting with Sir John?"

The Duke of Devonshire was as proud as my patron; and nothing in the great mansion which he was then building in the wilds of the Derbyshire Peak was likely to cause the gaping peasants more astonishment than he felt at this set-back. "I don't understand your Grace," he said at last, in a tone of offence.

"Nor I you," my lord answered, thoroughly roused.

"I am afraid—I have said too much," said the other, stiffly.

"Or too little," my lord retorted. "You must go on now."

"Must? Must?" quoth the duke, whose high spirit had ten years before led him to strike a blow that came near to costing him his estate.

"Ay, must—in justice," said my lord. "In justice to me as well as to others."

After a brief pause, "That is another thing," the Lord Steward answered civilly. "But—is it possible, duke, that you know so much, and do not know that Sir John asserts that you met him at Ashford,

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two days only before his capture? and entrusted him with a ring and a message—both for St. Germain's?"

"At Ashford?"

"Yes."

"This is sheer madness," my lord cried, holding his hand to his head. "Are you mad, Devonshire, or am I?"

Whether the duke, having heard Sir John's story and marked his manner of telling it, had prejudged the cause, or thought that my lord overacted surprise, he did not immediately answer, and when he did speak his tone was dry, though courteous. "Well, of course—it may be Sir John who is mad," he said.

"D——n Sir John," my lord answered, sitting up in the coach and fairly facing his companion. "You do not mean to tell me that you believe this story of a cock and a bull, and a—a——"

"A ring," said the Duke of Devonshire, quietly.

"Well?"

"Well, duke, it is this way," the Lord Steward replied. "Sir John has something to say about three others; Lord Marlborough, Ned Russell, and Godolphin. And what he says about them I know in the main to be true. Therefore——"

"You infer that he is telling the truth about me?" cried my lord, fuming, yet covering his rage with a decent appearance, since a hundred eyes were on them as they drove slowly round in the glass coach.

"Not altogether. There are other things."

"What other things?"

"The talk there was about your Grace and Middleton at the time of your resignation."

My lord groaned. "All the world knows that, it seems," he said. "And should know that I have never denied it."

"True."

"But this! It is the most absurd, the most ridiculous, the most fantastical story! How could I go out of town for twenty-four hours, and the fact not be known to half London? Let Sir John name the day."

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"He has," the other duke answered. "He lays it on the tenth of June."

"Well?"

"There was a Land Bank meeting of the council on that day. But your Grace did not attend it."

"No? No, I remember I did not. It was the day my mother was taken ill. She sent for me, and I lay at her house that night and the next."

His Grace of Devonshire coughed. "That is unfortunate," he said, and leaned forward to bow to the Bishop of London, whose chariot had just entered the square.

"Why?" said my lord, ready to take offence at anything.

"Because, though I do not doubt your word, the world will require witnesses. And Lady Shrewsbury's household is suspected. Her Jacobite leanings are known, and her people's evidence would go for little. That that should be the day—but there, there, your Grace must take courage," the duke continued kindly. "All that the party can do will be done. Within the week Lord Portland will be here, bringing His Majesty's commands; and we shall then know what he proposes to do about it. If I know the King, and I think I do——"

But the picture which these words suggested to my lord's mind was too much for his equanimity. To know for certain that the King, who had extended indulgence to him once, was in possession of this new accusation, and perhaps believed it, was bad enough; but to hear that Portland also was in the secret, and grim, faithful Dutchman as he was, might presently, in support of the low opinion of English fidelity which he held, quote him, the first Minister of England, was too much! In a hoarse voice he cut the duke short; asking to be set down before they quarrelled; and his Grace, hastening with a hurried word of sympathy to comply, my lord stepped out, and, looking neither to right nor left, passed into his house, and to the library, where, locking the door, he shut himself in with his trouble.

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CHAPTER XLII

I HAVE commonly reckoned it among my lord's greatest misfortunes that in a crisis of his affairs which demanded all the assistance that friendship, the closest and most intimate, could afford, he had neither wife nor child to whom he could turn, and from whom, without loss of dignity, he might receive comfort and support. He was a solitary man; separated from such near relations as he had by differences as well religious as political, and from the world at large by the grandeur of a position which imposed burdens as onerous as the privileges it conferred were rare.

To a melancholy habit, which some attributed to the sad circumstances attendant on his father's death, and others to the change of faith, which he had been induced to make on reaching manhood, he added a natural shyness and reserve; qualities which, ordinarily veiled from observation by manners, and an address the most charming and easy in the world, were none the less obstacles, where friendship was in question. Not that of friendship there was much among the political men of that day; the perils and uncertainties of the time inculcated a distrust, which was only overcome where blood or marriage cemented the tie—as in the case of Lords Sunderland, Godolphin, and Marlborough, and again of the Russells and Cavendishes. Be that as it may, my lord stood outside these bonds, and enjoyed and rued a splendid isolation. As if already selected by fortune for that strange combination of great posts with personal loneliness, which was to be more strikingly exhibited in the death-chamber of her late Majesty Queen Anne, he lived, whether in his grand house in St. James's Square, or at Eyford among the Gloucestershire Wolds, as much apart as any man in London or in England.

Withal, I know, men called him the King of Hearts. But the popularity of which that title seemed the sign and seal was factitious and unreal; born, while

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they talked with him, of his spontaneous kindness and boundless address; doomed to perish an hour later, of spite and envy, or of sheer inanition, since the duke was sensitive, over-proud for intimacy, flattered no man, and gave no man confidences.

Such an one bade fair, when in trouble, to eat his own heart. Prone to fancy all men's hands against him, his imagination doubled the shame and outdid the most scandalous. So far, indeed, was he from deriving comfort from things that would have restored such men as my Lord Marlborough to perfect self-respect and composure, that I believe, and, in fine, had it from himself, that the letter which the King wrote to him from Loo (and which came to his hands through Lord Portland's three days after the interview with his Grace of Devonshire) pained him more sensibly than all that had gone before.

"You may judge of my astonishment," His Majesty wrote, "at his effrontery in accusing you. You are, I trust, too fully convinced of the entire confidence which I place in you to think that such stories can make any impression on me. You will observe this honest man's sincerity, who only accuses those in my service, and not one of his own party."

That in His Majesty's letter which touched my lord home was less the magnanimity displayed in it than the remembrance that once before his Sovereign had dealt with the subject in the same spirit; and that now the world must know this. Of the immediate accusation, with all its details of time and circumstance, he thought little, believing, not only that the truth must quickly sweep it away, but that in the meantime few would be found so credulous as to put faith in it. But he saw with painful clearness that the charge would rub the old sore and gall the old raw; and he winced, seated alone in his library in the silence of the house, as if the iron already seared the living flesh. With throes of shame he foresaw what staunch Whigs, such as Somers and Wharton, would say of him; what the *Postboy* and the *Courant* would print of him; what the rank and file of the

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party—exposed to no danger in the event of a restoration, and consequently to few temptations to make their peace abroad—would think of their trusted leader, when they learned the truth.

On Marlborough and Russell, Godolphin and Sunderland, the breath of suspicion had blown; on him never, and he had held his head high. How could he meet them now? How could he face them? Nay, if that were all, how, he asked himself, could he face the honest Nonjuror? Or the honest Jacobite? Or the honest Tory? He, who had taken the oaths to the new government and broken them, who had set up the new government and deceived it, who had dubbed himself patriot—*cui bono*? Presently, brooding over it, he came to think that there was but one man in England *turpissimus*; that it would be better in the day of reckoning for the meanest carted pick-pocket, whose sentence came before him for revision, than for the King's secretary in his garter and robes!

Nor, if he had known all that was passing, and all that was being said, among those with whom his fancy painfully busied itself, would he have been the happier. For Sir John's statement got abroad with marvellous quickness. Before Lord Portland arrived from Holland the details were whispered in every tavern and coffee-house within the Bills. The Tories and Jacobites, aiming above everything at finding a counterblast to the Assassination Plot, the discovery of which had so completely sapped their credit with the nation, pounced on the scandal with ghoulish avidity, and repeated and exaggerated it on every occasion. Every Jacobite house of call, from the notorious "Dog" in Drury Lane, the haunt of mumpers and foot-pads, to the "Chocolate House" in St. James's, rang with it. For Sir John, all (they said among themselves) that they had expected of him was surpassed by this. He was extolled to the skies alike for what he had done and for what he had omitted; and as much for the wit that had confounded his enemies as for the courage that had protected his friends. For what Jacobite, seeing the

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enemy hoist with his own petard, could avoid a snigger? Or hear the word "Informer" without swearing that Sir John was the most honest man who ever signed his name to a deposition?

The Whigs, on the other hand, exasperated by an attack as subtle as it was unforeseen, denied the charges with a passion and fury that of themselves betrayed apprehension. Here, they said, was another Taafe; suborned by the same gang and the same vile machinations that had brought about the Lancashire failure, and hounded Secretary Trenchard to his death. Not content with threatening Sir John with the last penalties of treason and felony, and filling the "Rose Tavern" with protestations which admitted the weight while they denied the truth of the charges brought against their leaders—the party called aloud for meetings, inquiries, and prosecutions; to which the leaders soon found themselves pledged, whether they would or not.

Out of sensitiveness, or that over-appreciation of what was due to himself and others which in a degree unfitted him for public life, my lord had a week before this pleaded indisposition, and begun to keep the house; and to all requests proffered by his colleagues that he would take part in their deliberations returned a steadfast negative. This notwithstanding, everything that was done was communicated to him; and announcements of the meetings, which it was now proposed to hold—one at Lord Somers's in Lincoln's Inn Fields and the other at Admiral Russell's—would doubtless have been made to him within the hour. As it chanced, however, he received the news from another source. On the day of the decision, as he sat alone, dwelling on the past, the square was aroused at the quietest time of the forenoon by an arrival. With a huge clatter the countess's glass chariot, with its outriders, running footmen, and lolling waiting-women, rolled up to the door, and in a moment my lady was announced.

It is probable that there was no one whom he had less wish to see. But he could not deny himself to

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her, and he rose with an involuntary groan. The countess on her side was in no better temper, as her first words indicated. "My life, my lord, what is this I hear?" she cried as soon as the door closed upon her attendants. "That you are lying down to be trodden on! And cannot do this, and will not do that, but pule and cry at home while they spin a rope for you! 'Sakes, man! play the one side, play the other side—which you please! But play it, play it!"

My lord, chagrined as much by the intrusion as by the reproach, answered her with more spirit than he was wont to use to her. "I thought, madam," he answered sharply, "that the one thing you desired was my withdrawal from public life?"

"Ay, but not after this fashion!" she retorted, striking her ebony cane on the floor and staring at him, her raddled face and huge curled wig trembling. "If all I hear be true—and I hear that they are going to hold two inquests on you—and you continue to sit there, it will be a fine withdrawal! You will be doomed by James and blocked by William, and that d——d rogue, Jack Churchill, will wear your clothes! Withdrawal, say you? No, if you had withdrawn six months ago when I bade you, you would have gone and been thanked. But now the fat is in the fire, and, wanting courage, you'll frizzle, my lad."

"And whom have I to thank for that, madam?" he asked, with bitterness.

"Why, yourself, booby!" she cried.

"No, madam, your friends!" he replied—which was so true and hit the mark so exactly that my lady looked foolish for a moment. Without noticing the change, however, "Your friends, madam," he continued, "Lord Middleton and Sir John Fenwick, and Montgomery and the rest, whom you have never ceased pressing me join! Who unable to win me will now ruin me. But you are right, madam. I see, for myself now, that it is not possible to play against them with clean hands—and therefore I leave the game to them."

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"Pack of rubbish!" she cried.

"It is not rubbish, madam, as you will find," he answered coldly. "You say they will hold two inquests on me? There will be no need. Within the week my resignation of all my posts will be in the King's hands."

"And you?"

"And I, madam, shall be on my way to Eyford."

Now there is nothing more certain than that for a year past the countess had strained every nerve to detach the duke from the government, with a view to his reconciliation with King James and St. Germain's. But, having her full share of a mother's pride, she was as far from wishing to see him retire after this fashion as if she had never conceived the notion. And to this the asperity of her answer bore witness. "To Eyford?" she cried shrilly. "More like to Tower Hill! Or the Three Trees and a thirteen-ha'penny fee—for that is your measure! God, my lad, you make me sick! You make me sick!" she continued, her wrinkled old face distorted by the violence of her rage, and her cane going tap-a-tap in her half-palsied hand. "That a son of mine should lack the spirit to turn on these pettifoggers!"

"Your friends, madam," he said remorselessly.

"These perts and start-ups! But you are mad, man! You are mad," she continued. "Mad as King Jamie was when he fled the country—and who more glad than the Dutchman! And as it was with him so it will be with you. They will strip you, Charles! They will strip you bare as you were born! And the end will be, you'll lie with Ailesbury in the Tower, or bed with Tony Hamilton in a garret—*la bas!*"

"Which is precisely the course, madam, to which you have been pressing me," he replied with something of a sneer.

"Ay, with a full purse!" she screamed. "With a full purse, fool! With Eyford and fifty thousand guineas, my lad! But go, a beggar, as you'll go, and it is welcome you will be—to the door-key and the

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kennel, or like enough to King Louis' Bastile ! Tell me, man, that this is all nonsense ! That you'll show your face to your enemies, go abroad and be King again ! ”

My lord answered gravely that his mind was made up.

“ To go ? ” she gasped. “ To go to Eyford ? ” And raising her stick in her shaking hand, she made a gesture so menacing that, fearing she would strike him, my lord stepped back.

Nevertheless, he answered her firmly. “ Yes, to Eyford. My letter to the King is already written.”

“ Then that for you and your King ! ” she shrieked, and, in an excess of uncontrolled passion, she whirled her stick round and brought it down on a stand of priceless Venice crystal which stood beside her ; being the same that Seigniors Soranzo and Venier had presented to the duke in requital of the noble entertainment which my lord gave to the Venetian ambassadors the April preceding. The blow shivered the vases, which fell in a score of fragments to the floor ; but not content with the ruin she had accomplished, the countess struck fiercely again and again. “ There's for you, you poor speechless fool ! ” she continued. “ That a son of mine should lie down to his enemies ! There was never Brudenel did it. But your father !—he, too, was a——”

“ Madam ! ” he said, taking her up grimly. “ I will not hear you on that ! ”

“ Ay, but you shall hear me ! ” she screamed—and yet she spoke more soberly. “ He, too, was a——”

“ Silence ! ” he said ; and this time, low as his voice rang, ay, and though it trembled, it stilled her. “ Silence, madam,” he repeated, “ or you do that which neither the wrong you wrought so many years ago to him you miscall, nor the things common fame still tells of you, nor difference of creed, nor difference of party, have prevailed to effect. Say more of him,” he continued, “ and we do not meet again, my lady. For I have this at least from you—that I do not easily forgive.”

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She glared at him a moment, rage, alarm, and vexation, all distorting her face. Then, "The door!" she hissed. "The door, boor! You are still my son, and if you will not obey me, shall respect me. Take me out, and if ever I enter your house again——"

She did not complete the sentence, but lapsed into noddings and mowings and mutterings, her fierce black eyes flickering vengeance to come. However, my lord paid no heed to that, but glad, doubtless, to be rid of her visit, even at the cost of his Venetian, offered her his arm in silence and led her into the hall and to her chariot.

She could not avenge herself on him; and it may be she would not if she could. But there was one on whom her passion alighted, who with all her cunning little expected the impending storm. The most astute are sometimes found napping, and the smoothest pad-nag will plunge. Whether the favourite waiting-woman had overstepped her authority of late; presuming on a senility, which existed indeed, but neither absolutely blinded my lady nor was to be depended on in gusts of passion such as this; whether this was the case, I say, or Monterey, rendered incautious by success, was unfortunate enough to allow some look of spite and malice to escape her during the drive home, it is certain that at the door the storm broke. Without the least warning the countess, after using her arm to descend, turned on her, a very Bess of Hardwick.

"And you, you grinning ape!" she cried, "you come no farther! This is no home of yours; begone, or I will have you whipped! You don't go into my house again!"

The astonished woman, taken utterly aback and not in the least understanding, began to remonstrate. Her first thought was that the countess was ill. "Your ladyship is not well?" she cried, with solicitude veiling her alarm. "You cannot mean——"

"Ay, but I can! I can!" the old lady answered, mocking her. "You have done mischief enow, and do no more here! Where is that man of yours, who

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went and never came back, and nought but excuses? And now this."

"Oh, my lady, what ails you?" the waiting-woman cried. "What does this mean?"

"You know!" said my lady with an oath. "So begone about your business, and don't let me see your face again or it will be the worse for you."

Disarmed of her usual address by the suddenness of the attack, Monterey began to whimper, and again asked how she had offended her and what she had done to deserve this. "I, who have served you so long, and so faithfully?" she cried. "What have I done to earn this, my lady?"

"God and you know—better than I do!" was the fierce answer. And then, "Williams," the countess cried to her major-domo, who with the lacqueys and grooms was standing by enjoying the fall of the favourite—"see that that drab does not cross my threshold again, or you go, do you hear? Ay, mistress, you would poison me if you could!" the old lady went on, gibing, and pointing with her stick at the face, green with venom and spite, that betrayed the baffled woman's feelings. "Look at her! Look at her! There is Madame Voisin for you! There is Madame Turner! She would poison you all if she could. But you should have done it yesterday, you slut! You will not have the chance now. Put her rags out here—here on the road, and do you, Williams, send her packing, and see she takes naught of mine, not a pinner or a sleeve, or she goes to Paddington fair for it! Ay, you drab!" my lady continued, with cruel exultation, "I'll see you beat hemp yet! and your shoulders smarting!"

"May God forgive you," cried the waiting-woman, fighting with her rage.

"He may or He may not!" said the dreadful old lady, turning coolly to go in. "Anyway, your score won't stand for much in the sum, my girl."

And not until the countess had gone in and Madame Monterey saw before her the grinning faces of the servants, as they stood to bar the way, did she

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thoroughly take in what had happened to her, or the utter ruin of all her prospects which this meant. Then, choking with passion, rage, and despair, "Let me pass," she cried, advancing and trying frantically to push her way through them. "Let me pass, you boobies. Do you hear? How dare you——"

"Against orders, Madame Voisin!" said the majordomo, with a hoarse laugh; and he thrust her back. And when, maddened by the touch, and defeat, she flung herself on him in a frenzy, one of the lacqueys caught her round the waist and, lifting her off her legs, carried her out screaming and scratching, and set her down in the road amid the laughter of his companions.

"There," he said, "and next time better manners, mistress, or I'll drop you in the horse-pond. You are not young enough, nor tender enough for these airs! Ten years ago you might have scratched all you pleased!"

"Strike you dead!" she cried; "my husband—my husband shall kill you all! Ay, he shall!"

"When he gets out of the Gatehouse we will talk, mistress," the man answered. "But he's there, and you know it!"

CHAPTER XLIII

MY lord persisted in his design of retiring to Eyford; nor could all the persuasions of his friends, and of some who were less his friends than their own, induce him to attend either the meeting of the party at Admiral Russell's or that which was held in Lincoln's Inn Fields; a thing which I take to be in itself a refutation of the statement, sometimes heard in his disparagement, that he lacked strength. For it is on record that his Grace of Marlborough in the great war, where he had in a manner to contend with emperors and princes, held all together by his firmness and conduct; yet he failed with my lord, though he tried hard, pleading, as some thought, in his own

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cause. To his arguments and those of Admiral Russell and Lord Godolphin the hearty support of the party was not lacking, if it could have availed. But, as a fact, it went into the other scale, since in proportion as his followers proclaimed their faith in my lord's innocence, and denounced his accusers, he felt shame for the old folly and inconsistency that, known by some, and suspected by more, must now be proclaimed to the world. It was this which for a time paralysed the vigour and intellect that at two great crises saved the Protestant Party, and this which finally determined him to leave London.

It was not known, when he started, that horse-patrols had been ordered to the Kent and Essex roads in expectation of His Majesty's immediate crossing. Nor is it likely that the fact would have swayed him had he known it, since it was not upon His Majesty's indulgence—of which, indeed, he was assured—that he was depending; my lord being moved rather by considerations in his own mind. But, at Maidenhead, where he lay the first night, Mr. Vernon overtook him—coming up with him as he prepared to start in the morning—and gave him news which immediately altered his mind. Not only was His Majesty hourly expected at Kensington, where his apartments were being hastily prepared, but he had expressed his intention of seeing Fenwick at once, and sifting him.

"Nor is that all," Mr. Vernon continued. "I have reason to think that your Grace is under a complete misapprehension as to the character of the charges that are being made."

"What matter what the charges are?" my lord replied wearily, leaning back in his coach. For he had insisted on starting.

"It does matter very much—saving your presence, duke," Mr. Vernon answered bluntly; a sober and downright gentleman, whose after-succession to the seals, though thought at the time to be an excessive elevation, and of the most sudden, was justified by his honourable career. "Pardon me, I must speak.

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I have been swayed too long by your Grace's extreme dislike of the topic."

"Which continues," my lord said.

"I care not a jot if it does!" Mr. Vernon cried impetuously, and then met the duke's look of surprise and anger with, "Your Grace forgets that it is treason is in question! High Treason, not in the clouds and in *præterito* but in *præsenti* and in Kent! High Treason in aiding and abetting Sir John Fenwick, an outlawed traitor, and by his mouth and hand communicating with and encouraging the King's enemies."

"You are beside the mark, sir," my lord answered, in a tone of freezing displeasure. "That has nothing to do with it. It is a foolish tale which will not stand a minute. No man believes it."

"Maybe! But by G—d! two men will prove it."

"Two men?" quoth my lord, his ear caught by that.

"Ay, two men! And two men are enough, in treason."

My lord stared hard before him. "Who is the second?" he said at last.

"A dubious fellow, yet good enough for the purpose," the under-secretary answered, overjoyed that he had at last got a hearing. "A man named Matthew Smith, long suspected of Jacobite practices, and arrested with the others at the time of the late conspiracy, but released, as he says——"

"Well?"

"Corruptly," quoth the under-secretary coolly, and laid his hand on the check-string.

My lord sprang in his seat. "What?" he cried; and uttered an oath, a thing to which he rarely condescended. Then, "It is true I know the man——"

"He is in the countess's service."

"In her husband's. And he was brought before me. But the warrant was against one John Smith—or William Smith, I forget which—and I knew this person to be Matthew Smith, and the messenger himself avowing a mistake, I released the man."

"Of course," said Mr. Vernon, nodding impatiently.

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"Of course, but that, your Grace, is not the gravamen. It is a more serious matter that he alleges; namely, that he accompanied you to Ashford, that you there in his presence saw Sir John Fenwick, that you gave Sir John a ring—and, in a word, he confirms Sir John's statement in all points, and there being now two witnesses, the matter becomes grave. Shall I stop the coach?" and once more he made as if he would twitch the cord.

The duke, wearing a very sober face—yet one wherein the light of conflict began to flicker—drummed softly on the glass with his fingers. "How do you come by his evidence?" he said at last. "Has Sir John approved against him?"

"No, but Sir John sent for him the morning he saw Devonshire for the second time; and I suppose threatened him, for the fellow went to Trumball and said that he had evidence to give touching Sir John, if he could have His Majesty's word he should not suffer. It was given him, more or less; and he confirmed Sir John's tale *totidem verbis*. They have had him in the Gatehouse these ten days, it seems, on Trumball's warrant."

The duke drew a deep breath. "Mr. Vernon, I am much obliged to you," he said. "You have played the friend in my teeth. I see that I have treated this matter too lightly. Sir John, unhappy as he is in some of his notions, is a gentleman, and I was wrong to think that he would accuse me out of pure malice and without grounds. There is some ill practice here."

"Devilish ill," Mr. Vernon answered, scarce able to conceal his delight.

"Some plot."

"Ay, plot within plot!" cried the under-secretary, chuckling. "Shall I pull the string?"

The duke hesitated, his face plainly showing the conflict that was passing in his mind. Then, "If you please," he said.

And so there the coach came to a standstill, as I have often heard, on an old brick bridge short of Nettlebed, near the coming into the village from

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Maidenhead. One of the out-riders, spurring to the carriage window for orders, my lord cried, "Turn! Maidenhead!"

"No, London," said Mr. Vernon firmly. "And one of you," he continued, "gallop forward, and have horses ready at the first change house. And so to the next."

The duke, his head in a whirl with what he had heard, pushed resistance no farther, but letting the reins fall from his hands, consented to be led by his companion.

In deference to his wishes, however—not less than to his health, which the events of the last few weeks had seriously shaken—it was determined to conceal his return to town; the rather as the report of his absence might encourage his opponents and lead them to show their hands more clearly. Hence in the common histories of the day, and even in works so learned and generally well-informed as the Bishop of Salisbury's and Bishop Kennitt's, it is said and asserted that the Duke of Shrewsbury retired to his seat in Gloucestershire before the King's return, and remained there in seclusion until his final resignation of the seals. It is probable that by using Mr. Vernon's house in place of his own, and by his extreme avoidance of publicity while he lay in town, my lord had himself to thank for this statement; but that in making it these writers, including the learned Bishop Burnet, are wanting in accuracy the details I am to present will clearly show.

The truth is that, entering London late that night, my lord drove to Mr. Vernon's; who, going next morning to the office, presently returned with the news that the King had ridden in from Margate after dining at Sittingbourne, and would give an audience to Sir John on the following day. But, as these tidings did no more than fulfil expectation, and scarcely accounted for the air of briskness and satisfaction which marked the burly and honest gentleman, it is to be supposed that he did not tell the duke all he had learned. And, indeed, I know this to be the fact.

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CHAPTER XLIV

ABOUT ten on the morning of the 3rd of November of that year eight gentlemen of the first rank in England were assembled in the gallery at Kensington, awaiting a summons to the King's closet. With the exception of Lord Godolphin, who had resigned his office three days earlier, all belonged to the party in power; notwithstanding which, a curious observer might have detected in their manner and intercourse an air of reserve and constraint unusual among men at once so highly placed and of the same opinions. A little thought, however, and a knowledge of the business which brought them together, would have explained this.

While the Duke of Devonshire, the Marquis of Dorset, and Lord Portland formed a group apart, it was to be noticed that Lords Marlborough and Godolphin and Admiral Russell seemed to fall naturally into a second group; but though the movements of the company constantly left them together, they never suffered this arrangement to last, but either effected a temporary change, by accosting the Lord Keeper or Mr. Secretary Trumbull, or through the medium of Sir Edward Russell's loud voice and boisterous manners, they wrought a momentary fusion of the company.

"By the Eternal, I am the most unlucky man," the Admiral cried, addressing the whole company on one of these occasions. "If Sir John had lied about me only, I should have given it him back in his teeth, and so fair and square; it is a poor cook does not know his own batch. But because he drags in the duke, and the duke chooses to get the fantods, and shirks him, I stand the worse!"

"Sir Edward," said Lord Dorset, speaking gravely and in a tone of rebuke, "no one supposes that the Duke of Shrewsbury is aught but ill. And, allow me to say that under the circumstances you are unwise to put it on him."

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"But d——n me, he has no right to be ill!" cried the seaman, whose turbulent spirit was not easily put down. "If he were here, I would say the same to his face. And that is flat!"

He was proceeding with more, but at that moment the door of the royal closet was thrown open, and a gentleman usher appeared, inviting them to enter. "My lords and gentlemen," he said, "His Majesty desires you to be seated, as at the Council. He will be presently here."

The movement into the next room being made, the conversation took a lower tone, each speaking only to his neighbour—one discussing the King's crossing and the speed of his new yacht, another the excellent health and spirits in which His Majesty had returned—until, a door at the lower end of the room being opened, a murmur of voices and stir of feet were heard, and after a moment's delay Sir John Fenwick entered under guard, and with a somewhat dazed air advanced to the foot of the table.

The Lord Steward rose and gravely bowed to him; and this courtesy, in which he was followed by all except the admiral, was returned by the prisoner.

"Sir John," said the Duke of Devonshire, "the King will be presently here."

"I am obliged to your Grace," Fenwick answered, and stood waiting.

His gaunt form, clothed in black, his face, always stern and now haggard, his eyes, in which pride and fanaticism at one moment overcame and at another gave place to the look of a hunted beast—these things must have made him a pathetic figure at any time and under any circumstances. How much more when those who gazed on him knew that he stood on the brink of death! and knew, too, that within a few moments he must meet the prince whom for years he had insulted and defied, and in whose hands his fate now lay!

That some, less interested in the matter than others, harboured such thoughts, the looks of grave compassion which Lords Devonshire and Dorset cast

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on him seemed to prove. But their reflections, which, doubtless, carried them back to a time when, the most brilliant and cynical of courtiers, he played a foremost part in the Whitehall of the restoration—these, no less than the mutterings and restless movements of Russell, who, in his enemy's presence, could scarcely control himself, were cut short by the King's entrance.

He came in unannounced, and very quietly, at a door behind the Lord Steward; and, all rising to their feet, he bade them in a foreign accent, "Good day," adding immediately, "Be seated, my lords. My Lord Steward, we will proceed."

His entrance and words were abrupt, if not awkward; they lacked alike the grace which all remembered in Charles, and the gloomy majesty which the second James had at his command. And men felt the lack. Yet, as he took his stand, one hand lightly resting on the back of the Lord Steward's chair, the slight, sombre figure and sallow, bony face, staring out of its great peruke, had a dignity of their own. For it could not be forgotten that he was that which no Stuart King of England had ever been—a soldier and a commander from boyhood, at home in all the camps of Flanders and the Rhine, familiar with every peril of battle and breach, at his ease if anywhere, where other men blenched and drew back. And the knowledge that this was so invested him with a certain awe and grandeur even in the eyes of courtiers. On this day he wore a black suit, relieved only by the ribbon of the Garter; and as he stood he let his chin sink so low on his breast that his eyes, which could on occasion shine with a keen and almost baleful light, were hidden.

The Lord Steward, in obedience to his command, was about to address Sir John, when the King, with a brusqueness characteristic of him, intervened. "Sir John," he said, in a harsh, dry voice, and speaking partly in French, partly in English, "your papers are altogether unsatisfactory. Instead of giving us an account of the plots formed by you and your

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accomplices, plots of which all the details must be exactly known to you, you tell us stories without authority, without date, without place, about noblemen and gentlemen with whom you do not pretend to have had any intercourse. In short, your confession appears to be a contrivance intended to screen those who are really engaged in designs against us, and to make me suspect and discard those in whom I have good reason to place confidence. If you ask for any favour from me, therefore, you will give me this moment a full and straightforward account of what you know of your own knowledge. And—but do you tell him the rest, my lord.”

“Sir John,” said the Lord Steward in a tone serious and compassionate, “His Majesty invites your confidence, and will for good reason show you his favour. But you must deserve it, and it is his particular desire that you conclude nothing from the fact that you are admitted to see him.”

“On the contrary,” said the King, drily, “I see you, sir, for the sake of my friends. If, therefore, you can substantiate the charges you have made, it behoves you to do it. Otherwise, to make a full and free confession of what you do know.”

“Sir,” said Sir John hoarsely, and speaking for the first time, “I stand here worse placed than any man ever was. For I am tried by those whom I accuse.”

The King slightly shrugged his shoulders. “*Fallait penser la*—when you accused them,” he muttered.

Sir John cast a despairing glance along the table, and seemed to control himself with difficulty. At length, “I can substantiate nothing against three of those persons,” he said; whereon some of those who listened breathed more freely.

“And that is all, sir, that you have to say?” said the King, ungraciously; and as if he desired only to cut short the scene.

“All,” said Sir John firmly, “against those three persons. But as to the fourth, the Duke of Shrewsbury, who is not here——”

The King could not suppress an exclamation of

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contempt. "You may spare us that fable, sir," he said. "It would not deceive a child, much less one who holds the duke high in his esteem."

Sir John drew himself to his full height and looked along the table, his gloomy eyes threatening. "And that fable I can prove, sir," he said. "That I can substantiate, sir. To that I have a witness, and a man above suspicion! If I prove that, sir, shall I have your Majesty's favour?"

"Perfectly," said the King, shrugging his shoulders, amid a general thrill and movement; for though rumours had gone abroad, by no means the whole of Sir John's case was known, even to some at the table. "Prove it! Prove that, sir, and not a hair of your head shall fall. You have my promise."

However, before Sir John could answer, Mr. Secretary Trumball rose in his place and intervened. "I crave your indulgence, sir," he said, "while, with your Majesty's permission, I call in the Duke of Shrewsbury, who is in waiting."

"In waiting?" said the King, in a voice of surprise; nor was the surprise confined to him. "I thought that he was ill, Mr. Secretary, and in the country."

"He is so ill, sir, as to be very unfit to be abroad," the secretary answered. "Yet he came to be in readiness, if your Majesty needed him. Sir John Fenwick persisting, I ask your indulgence, sir, while I fetch him."

The King nodded, but with a pinched and dissatisfied face; and Sir William retiring, in a moment returned with the duke. At his entrance, His Majesty greeted him drily, and with a hint of displeasure in his manner; thinking probably that this savoured too much of a *coup de théâtre*, a thing he hated. But seeing, before the duke took his seat, how ill he looked, his face betrayed signs of disturbance; after which, his eyelids drooping, it fell into the dull and sphinx-like mould which it could assume when he did not wish his thoughts to be read by those about him.

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That the duke's pallor and wretched appearance gave rise to suspicion in other minds is equally certain; the more hardy of those present, such as my Lord Marlborough and the Admiral, being aware that nothing short of guilt and the immediate prospect of detection could so change themselves; and while some felt a kind of admiration, as they conned and measured the stupendous edifice of deceit which my lord had so long and perfectly concealed behind a front of brass—as to take in all the world—others were already busied with the effect the disclosure would have on the party, and how this might be softened, and that explained, and in a word another man substituted with as little shock as possible for this man. Nor were these emotions at all weakened when my lord, after saluting the King, took his seat, without speaking or meeting the general gaze.

"Now, sir," said the King impatiently, when all was quiet again, "the duke is here. Proceed."

"I will," Sir John answered with greater hardiness than he had yet used. "I have simply to repeat to his face what I have said behind his back: that on the 10th of last June, in the evening, he met me at Ashford, in Kent, and gave me a ring and a message, bidding me carry both with me to St. Germain's."

My lord looked slowly round the table, then at Sir John, and it startled some to see that he had compassion in his face.

"Sir John," he said, after, as it seemed, weighing the words he was about to speak, "you are in such a position, it were barbarous to insult you. But you must needs, as you have accused me before His Majesty and these gentlemen, hear me state, also before them, that there is not a word of truth in what you say."

Sir John stared at him and breathed hard. "*Mon dieu!*" he exclaimed, and his voice sounded sincere.

"I was not at Ashford on the 10th of June," the duke continued with dignity, "or on any day in that month. I never saw you there, and I gave you no ring."

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"*Mon dieu !*" Sir John muttered again ; and he seemed to be unable to take his eyes off the other.

Now it is certain that whatever the majority of those present thought of this—and the demeanour of the two men was so steadfast that even Lord Marlborough's acumen was at fault—the King's main anxiety was to be rid of the matter ; and with some impatience he tried to put a stop to it at this point. "Is it worth while to carry this farther, my lords?" he said fretfully. "We know our friends. We know our enemies also. This is a story *pour rire*, and deserving only of contempt."

But Sir John cried out at that, protesting bitterly and fiercely, and recalling the King's promise ; and the duke being no less urgent—though as some thought a little unseasonably for his own interests—that the matter be sifted to the bottom, the King had no option but to let it go on. "Very well," he said ungraciously, "if he will have his witness, let him." And then, with one of these spirits of peevishness which stood in strange contrast with his wonted magnanimity, he added to the Duke of Shrewsbury, "It is your own choice, my lord. Don't blame me."

The querulous words bore a meaning which all recognised ; and some at the table started, and resumed the calculation how they should trim their sails in a certain event. But nothing ever became the duke better than the manner in which he received that insinuation. "Be it so, sir," he said with spirit. "My choice and desire is that Sir John have as full a share of justice as I claim for myself, and as fair a hearing. Less than that were inconsistent with your Majesty's prerogative, and my honour."

The King's only answer was a sulky and careless nod. On which Sir William Trumball, after whispering the prisoner, went out, and after a brief delay, which seemed to many at the table long enough, returned with Matthew Smith.

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CHAPTER XLV

THAT the villain expected nothing so little as to see the man he was preparing to ruin I can well believe; and equally that the ordeal, sudden and unforeseen, tried his iron composure. I have heard that after glancing once at the duke he averted his eyes, and thenceforth looked and addressed himself entirely to the end of the table where the King stood. But, this apart, it could not be denied that he played his part to a marvel. Known to more than one as a ruffling blade about town, who had grown sober, but not less dangerous, with age and the change of times, he had still saved some rags and tatters of a gentleman's reputation; and he dressed himself accordingly. Insomuch that, as he stood beside Sir John, his stern set face and steadfast bearing made an impression not unfavourable at the set-out.

Nor, when bidden by the King to speak and say what he knew, did he fall below the expectations which his appearance had created; though this was due in some measure to my lord's self-control, who neither by word nor sign betrayed the astonishment he felt, when the man to whom for years past he had only spoken casually (and once in six months as it were) proceeded to recount with the utmost fulness and particularity every detail of the journey, which, as he said, they two had taken together to Ashford. At what time they started, where they lay, by what road they travelled—at all Smith was pat. Nor did he stop there; but went on to relate with the same ease and audacity the heads of talk that had passed between Sir John and his companion at the inn.

It was not possible that a story so told, with minutiae, with date, and place, and circumstance, should fall on ears totally deaf. The men who listened were statesmen, versed in deceptions and acquainted with affairs—men who knew Oates and had heard Dangerfield; yet, as they listened, they shut their eyes and reopened them to assure them-

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selves that this was not a dream ! Before his appearance, even Lord Portland, whose distrust of English loyalty was notorious, had been inclined to ridicule Sir John's story as a desperate card played for life ; and this, in teeth of my lord's disorder, so incredible did it appear that one of the King's principal Ministers should stoop to a thing so foolish. Now, it was a sign pregnant of meaning that no one looked at his neighbour, but all gazed either at the witness or at the table. And some who knew my lord best, and had the most affection for him, felt the air heavy, and the stillness of the room oppressive.

Suddenly the current of the story was broken by the King's harsh accent. "What was the date," he asked, "on which you reached Ashford?"

"The 10th of June, sir."

"Where was the duke on that day?" William continued, turning to the Lord Steward. His tone and question, both implying the most perfect contempt for the tale to which he was listening, in a measure broke the spell ; and had the reply been satisfactory all would have been over. But the Duke of Devonshire, turning to my lord for the answer, got only that he lay those two nights at his mother's, in the suburbs ; and thereon a blank look fell on more than one face. The King, indeed, sniffed and muttered, "Then twenty witnesses can confute this !" as if the answer satisfied him, and was all he had expected ; but that others were at gaze, and doubted, was as noticeable as that those who looked most solemn and thoughtful were the three who had themselves stood in danger that day.

At a nod from the King, Smith resumed his tale ; but in a moment was pulled up short by Lord Dorset, who requested His Majesty's leave to put a question. Having got permission, "How do you say that the duke—came to take *you* with him?" the marquiss asked sharply.

"To take me, my lord?"

"Yes."

"Must I answer that question?"

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"Yes."

"Well, I had previously been the medium of communication between his Grace and Sir John," Smith answered drily. "Precisely as on former occasions I had acted as agent between his Grace and Lord Middleton."

My lord started and half rose. Then, as he fell back into his seat, "That, sir, is the first word of truth this person has spoken," he said with dignity. "It is a fact that in the year '92 he twice brought me a note from Lord Middleton and arranged a meeting between us."

"Precisely," Smith answered with effrontery, "as I arranged this meeting."

On that for the first time my lord's self-control abandoned him. He started to his feet. "You scoundrel!" he cried, vehemently. "You lie in your teeth! Sir—pardon me, but this is—this is too much! I cannot sit by and hear it!"

By a gesture not lacking in kindness the King bade him resume his seat. Then, "*Peste!*" he said, taking snuff with a droll expression of chagrin. "Will anyone else ask a question? My Lord Dorset has not been fortunate. As the *Advocatus Diaboli*, perhaps, he may one day shine."

"If your Majesty pleases," Lord Marlborough said, "I will ask one. But I will put it to Sir John, and he can answer it or not as he likes. How did you know, Sir John, that it was the Duke of Shrewsbury who met you at Ashford, and conferred with you?"

"I knew the duke," Sir John answered. "I had seen him often, and spoken with him occasionally."

"How often had you spoken with him before this meeting?"

"Possibly a dozen occasions."

"You had not had any long conversation with him?"

"No; but I could not be mistaken. I know him," Sir John added, with a flash of bitter meaning, "as well as I know you, Lord Marlborough!"

"He gave his title?"

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"No, he did not," Sir John answered. "He gave the name of Colonel Talbot."

Someone at the table—it was Lord Portland—drew his breath sharply through his teeth; nor could the impression made by a statement that at first blush seemed harmless, and even favourable to the duke, be ignored or mistaken. Three out of four who sat there were aware that my lord had used that name in his wild and boyish days, when he would be *incognito*; moreover, the use of even that flimsy disguise cast a sort of decent probability over a story which at its barest seemed incredible. For the first time the balance of credit and probability swung against my lord; a fact subtly indicated by the silence which followed the statement and lasted a while, no one at the table speaking or volunteering a farther question. For the time Matthew Smith was forgotten, or the gleam of insolent triumph in his eye might have said somewhat. For the time Sir John took a lower seat. Men's minds were busy with the duke, and the duke only; busy with what the result would be to him, and to the party, were this proved; while most, perceiving dully and by instinct that they touched upon a great tragedy, shrank from the *dénouement*.

At last, in the silence, the duke rose, and, swaying blindly to his feet, caught at the table to steady himself. For two nights he had not slept.

"Duke," said the King, suddenly, "you had better speak sitting."

The words were meant in kindness, but they indicated a subtle change of attitude—they indicated that even the King now felt the need of explanation and a defence; and my lord, seeing this, and acknowledging the invitation to be seated only by a slight reverence, continued to stand, though the effort made his weakness evident. Yet when he had cleared his throat and spoke, his voice had the old ring of authority—with a touch of pathos added, as of a dying king from whose hand the sceptre was passing.

"Sir," he said, "the sins of Colonel Talbot were not few. But this, of which this fellow speaks, is not

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of the number ; nor have you, or my lords, to do with them. Doubtless, along with my fellows I shall have -- to give an account of them one day. But as to the present, and the Duke of Shrewsbury—with whom alone you have to deal—I will make a plain tale. This man has said that in '92 he was a go-between for me and Lord Middleton. It is true ; as you, sir, know, and my lords, if they know it not already, must now know. For the fact, Lord Middleton and I were relations, we met more than once at that time, we supped together before he went to France. I promised on my part to take care of his interests here ; he in return offered to do me good offices there. As to the latter I told him I had offended too deeply to be forgiven ; yet tacitly I left him to make my peace with the late King if he could. It was a folly and a poltroonery," the duke continued, holding out his hands with a pathetic gesture. " It was, my lords, to take a lower place than the meanest nonjuror who honourably gives up his cure. I see that, sir ; and have known it, and it has weighed on me for years. And now I pay for it. But for this"—and with the word, my lord's voice grew full and round and he stood erect, one hand in the lace of his steinkirk tie and his eyes turned steadfastly on his accuser—" for this which that man, presuming on an old fault, and using this knowledge of it, would foist on me, I know nothing of it ! I know nothing of it. It is some base and damnable practice. At this moment and here I cannot refute it ; but at the proper time and in another place I shall refute it. And now and here I say that as to it, I am not guilty—on my honour ! "

As the last word rang through the room he sat down, looking round him with a kind of vague defiance. There was a silence, broken presently by the Lord Steward, who rose, his voice and manner betraying no little emotion. " His Grace is right, sir, I think," he said. " I believe with him that this is some evil practice ; but it is plain that it has gone so far that it cannot stop here. I would suggest, therefore, if your Majesty sees fit——"

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A knock at the door interrupted him ; he turned that way, and paused. The King, too, glanced round with a gesture of annoyance. "See what it is," he said.

Sir William Trumball rose and went, and after a brief conference, during which the lords at the table continued to cast impatient glances towards the door, he returned. "If it please you, sir," he said, "a witness desires to be heard." And with that his face expressed so much surprise that the King stared at him in wonder.

"A witness?" said the King, and pished and fidgeted in his chair. Then, "This is not a Court of Justice," he continued peevishly. "We shall have all the world here presently. But—well, let him in."

Sir William obeyed, and went and returned under the eyes of the Council ; nor will the reader who has perused with attention the earlier part of this history be greatly surprised to hear that when he returned, I, Richard Price, was with him.

I am not going to dwell on the misery through which I had gone in anticipation of this appearance ; the fears which I had been forced to combat ; the night watches through which I had lain, sweating and awake. Suffice it that I stood there at last, seeing in a kind of maze the sober lights and grave colours of the room, and the faces at the table all turned towards me—stood there, not in the humble guise befitting my station, but in velvet and ruffles, sword and peruke, the very double, as the mirror before which I had dressed assured me, of my noble patron. This, at Mr. Vernon's suggestion and by his contrivance.

While I had lived in my lord's house, and moved to and fro soberly garbed, in a tie-wig or my own hair, the likeness had been no more than ground for a nudge and a joke among the servants. Now, dressed as Smith had dressed me, in a suit of the duke's clothes, and one of his perukes, and trimmed and combed by one who knew him, the resemblance I presented was so remarkable that none of the lords at the table could be blind to it. One or two, in

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sheer wonder, exclaimed at it; while Sir John, who, poor gentleman, was more concerned than any, fairly gasped with dismay.

It was left to the Duke of Devonshire to break the spell. "What is this?" he said in the utmost astonishment. "Who is this, and what does it mean?"

The King, who had once noted that very likeness, which all now saw, and for that reason, perhaps, was the first to read the riddle, laughed drily. "Two very common things, my lord," he said, "a rogue and a fool. Speak, man," he continued, addressing me. "You were in the duke's household a while ago? *n'est-ce pas ça?* I saw you here?"

"Yes, your Majesty," I said, hardly keeping my fears within bounds.

"And you have been playing his part, I suppose? Eh? At—how do you call the place—Ashford?"

"Yes, your Majesty—under compulsion," I answered, trembling.

"Ay! Compulsion of that good gentleman at the foot of the table, I suppose?"

The words of assent were on my lips; a cry, and an exceeding bitter cry, stayed their utterance. It came from Sir John Fenwick. Dumbfounded for a time, between astonishment and suspicion, between wonder what this travesty meant, and wonder why it was assumed, he had discerned at length its full scope and where it touched him. With a cry of rage he threw up his hands in protest, then in a flash he turned on the villain by his side. "You d——d scoundrel!" he cried; "you have destroyed me! You have murdered me!"

And before he could be prevented his fingers were in Smith's neckcloth, and clutching his throat; and so staunch was his hold that Admiral Russell and Sir William Trumbull had to rise and drag him away by force. "Easy, easy, Sir John," said the admiral with rough sympathy. "Be satisfied. He will get his deserts. Please God, if I had him on my ship an hour his back should be worse than Oates's!"

Sir John's rage and disappointment were painful

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to witness, and trying even to men of the world. But what shall I say of the fury of the man at bay, who, denounced and convicted, saw, white-faced, his long-spun web swept easily aside? Probably he knew, as soon as he saw me, that the game was lost, and could have slain me with a look. And most men would have been on their knees. But he possessed, God knows it, a courage as rare and perfect as the cause in which he displayed it was vile and abominable; and in a twinkling he recovered himself, and was Matthew Smith once more. While the room rang with congratulations, questions, answers, and exclamations, and I had much ado to answer one half of the noble lords who would examine me, his voice, raised and strident, was heard above the tumult.

"Your Majesty is easily deceived!" he cried, his tone flouting the presence in which he stood; yet partly out of curiosity, partly in astonishment at his audacity, they turned to listen. "Do you think it is for nothing his Grace keeps a double in his house? Or that it boots much whether he or his secretary went to meet Sir John! Enough! I have here, here!" he continued, tapping his breast and throwing back his head, "that that shall outface him, be he never so clever! Does his double write his hand too? Read that, sir. Read that, my lords, and say what you think of your Whig leader."

And with a reckless gesture, he flung a letter on the table. But the action and words were so lacking in respect for the King's presence that for a moment no one took it up, the English lords who sat within reach disdaining to touch it. Then Lord Portland made a long arm, and, taking the paper with Dutch phlegm and deliberation, opened it.

"Have I your Majesty's leave?" he said; and then, the King nodding peevishly, "This is not his Grace's handwriting," the Dutch lord muttered, pursing up his lips, and looking dubiously at the script before him.

"No, but it is his signature!" Smith retorted fiercely. And so set was he on this last card he was

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playing that his eyes started from his head, and the veins rose thick on his hands where they clutched the table before him. "It is his hand at foot. That I swear!" he cried.

"Truly, my man, I think it is," Lord Portland answered coolly. "Shall I read the letter, sir?"

"What is it?" asked the King with irritation.

"It appears to be a letter—to the Duke of Berwick, at the late Bishop of Chester's house in Hogsden Gardens," Lord Portland answered, leisurely running his eye down the lines as he spoke, "bidding him look to himself, as his lodging is known."

At that it was wonderful to see what a sudden gravity fell on the faces at the table. This touched home. This charge was a hundred times more likely than that which had fallen through. Could it be that after all the man had his Grace on the hip? Lord Marlborough showed his emotion by a face more than commonly serene; Admiral Russell by a sudden flush; Godolphin by the attention he paid to the table before him. Nor was Smith behindhand in noting the effect he had produced. For an instant he towered high, his face gleaming with malevolent triumph. He thought that the tables were turned.

Then, "In whose hand is the body of the paper?" the King asked.

"Your Majesty's," Lord Portland answered, with a grim chuckle, and after a pause long enough to accentuate the answer.

"I thought so," said the King. "It was the Friday the plot was discovered. I remember it. I am afraid that if you impeach the duke—you must impeach me with him."

At that all understood; and there was a great roar of laughter, which had not worn itself out before one and another began to press their congratulations on the duke. He for his part sat as if stunned; answering with a forced smile where it was necessary, more often keeping silence. He had escaped the pit digged for him, and the net so skilfully laid. But his face betrayed no triumph.

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Matthew Smith, on the other hand, brought up short by that answer, could not believe it. He stood awhile like a man in a fit, the veins of his neck swelling; then, the sweat standing on his brow, he cried that they were all leagued against him; that it was a plot; that it was not His Majesty's hand! and so on, and so on, with oaths and curses, and other things very unfit for the King's ears, or the place in which he stood.

Nevertheless, for a minute no one knew what to do, each looking at his neighbour; then the Lord Steward, rising from his chair, cried in a voice of thunder, "Take that man away, Mr. Secretary! This is your business! Out with him, sir!" On which Sir William called in the messengers, and they laid hands on him. By that time, however, he had recovered the will and grim composure which were the man's best characteristics; and with a last malign and despairing look at my lord, he suffered them to lead him out.

CHAPTER XLVI

THAT was a great day for the duke, but it was also, I truly believe, one of the saddest of a not unhappy life. He had gained the battle but at a cost known only to himself, though guessed by some. The story of the old weakness had been told, as he had foreseen it must be told, and even while his friends pressed round him and cried *Salve Imperator!* rejoicing in the fall he had given his foes, he was aware of the wound bleeding inwardly, and in his mind was already borne out of the battle.

Yet in that room was one sadder. Sir John, remaining at the foot of the table, frowned along it, gloomy and downcast; too proud to ask or earn the King's favour, yet shaken by the knowledge that now—now was the time; that in a little while the door would close on him, and with it the chance of life—life with its sunshine and air, and freedom, its whirligigs and revenges. Some thought that in considera-

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tion of the trick which had been played upon him, the King might properly view him with indulgence, and were encouraged in this by the character for clemency which even his enemies allowed that Sovereign. But William had other views on this occasion; and when the hub-bub which Smith's removal had caused had completely died away, he addressed Sir John coldly, advising him to depend rather on deserving his favour by a full discovery than on such ingenious contrivances as that which had just been exposed.

"I was no party to it," the unhappy gentleman answered.

"Therefore it shall tell neither for nor against you," the King retorted. "Have you anything more to say?"

"I throw myself on your Majesty's clemency."

"That will not do, Sir John," the King answered, sternly. "You must speak—or the alternative does not lie with me. But you know it."

"And I choose it," Sir John cried, raising his head and recovering his spirit and courage.

"So be it," His Majesty answered, slowly and solemnly. "I will not say that I expected less from you. My lords, let him be removed."

And with that the messengers came in, and Sir John bowed and went with them. It may have been fancy, but I thought that as he turned from the table a haggard shade fell on his face, and a soul in mortal anguish looked an instant from his eyes. But the next moment he was gone.

I never saw him again. That night the news was everywhere that Goodman, one of the two witnesses against him, had fled the country; and for a time it was believed that Sir John would escape. How, in face of that difficulty, those who were determined on his death effected it, how he was attainted, and how he suffered on Tower Hill with all the forms and privileges of a peer—on January 28th of the succeeding year—is a story too trite and familiar to call for repetition.

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On his departure the council broke up, His Majesty retiring. Before he went, a word was said about me; and some who had greater regard for the *post factum* than the *pœnitentia* were for sending me to the Compter, and leaving the law officers to deal with me. But, my lord, rousing himself, interposed, spoke for me, and would have given bail had they persisted. Seeing, however, how gravely he took it, and being inclined to please him, they desisted, and I was allowed to go, on the simple condition that the duke kept me under his own eye. This he very gladly consented to do.

Nor was it the only kindness he did me, or the greatest; for having heard from me at length and in detail all the circumstances leading up to my timely intervention, he sent for me a few days later, and placing a paper in my hands, bade me read the gist of it. I did so, and found it to be a free pardon passed under the Great Seal and granted to Richard Price and Mary Price his wife for all acts and things done by them jointly or separately against the King's Most Excellent Majesty, within or without the realm.

It was at Eyford he handed me this—in the oak parlour looking upon the bowling green—where I had already begun to wait upon him on one morning in the week, to check the steward's accounts and tallies. The year was nearly spent, but the autumn was fine, and the sunlight which lay on the smooth turf blended with the russet wall of beech trees that rise beyond. I had been thinking of Mary and the quiet courtyard at the hospital, which the bowling-green somewhat resembled—being open to the park on one side only; and when, perusing the paper, I came to her name—or rather to the name that was hers and yet mine—I felt such a flow of love and gratitude and remembrance overcome me as left me speechless; and this directed, not only to him but to her—seeing that it was her advice and her management that had brought me against my will to this haven and safety.

"The duke saw my emotion and read my silence aright. "Well," he said, "are you satisfied?"

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I told him that if I were not I must be the veriest ingrate living.

"And you have nothing more to ask?" he continued, still smiling.

"Nothing," I said. "Except—except that which it is not in your lordship's power to grant."

"How?" said he with a show of surprise and resentment. "Not satisfied yet? What is it?"

"If she were here!" I said. "If she were here, my lord! But Dunquerque——"

"Is a far cry, eh? And the roads are bad. And the seas——"

"Are worse," I said, gloomily, looking at the paper as Tantalus looked at the water. "And to get word to her is not of the easiest."

"No," the duke said. "Say you so? Then what do you make of this, faint-heart?" And he pointed through the open window.

I looked, and on the seat—which a moment before had been vacant—the seat under the right-hand yew-hedge where my lord sometimes smoked his pipe—I saw a girl seated with her head bent and her shoulder and the nape of her neck turned to us. She was making marks on the turf with a stick she held, and poring over them when made, as if the world held nothing else, so that I had not so much as a glimpse of her face. But I knew that it was Mary.

"Come," said my lord, pleasantly. "We will go to her. It may be she will not have the pardon—after all. Seeing that there is a condition to it."

"A condition?" I cried, a little troubled.

"To be sure, blockhead," he answered, in high good humour. "In whose name is it?"

Then I saw what he meant and laughed, foolishly. But the event came nearer to proving him true than he then expected. For when she saw us standing before her and understood what the paper was, she stepped back and put her hands behind her, and would not touch or take it; while her small face cried pale mutiny.

"No, I'll not tell!" she cried. "I'll not tell!"

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I'll not have it. Blood-money does not thrive. If that is the price——"

"My good girl," said my lord, cutting her short, yet without impatience. "That is not the price. This is the Price. And the pardon goes with him."

* * * * *
I believe that I have now told enough to discharge myself of that which I set out to do; I mean the clearing my lord in the eyes of all judicious persons of those imputations which a certain faction have never ceased to heap on him, and this with a greater assiduity and spite since he by his single conduct at the time of the late Queen's death was the means under Providence of preserving the Protestant Succession and liberties in these islands.

That during the long interval of seventeen years which separated the memorable meeting at Kensington—the one I have ventured to describe—from the still more famous scene in the Queen's death-chamber, he took no part in public life has seemed to some a crime, or the tacit avowal of one. How far these err, and how ill-qualified they are to follow the workings of that noble mind, will appear in the pages I have written; which show with clearness that the retirement on which so much stress has been laid, was due not to guilt but to an appreciation of honour so delicate that a spot invisible to the common eye seemed to him a stain *non subito delanda*. After the avowal made before his colleagues—of the communications, I mean, with Lord Middleton—nothing would do but he must leave London at once, and seek in the shades and retirement of Eyford that peace of mind and ease of body which had for the moment abandoned him.

He went, and for a time still retained office. Later, notwithstanding the most urgent and flattering instances on the King's part—which yet exist, honourable alike to the writer and the recipient—he persisted in his resolution to retire, and on the 12th of December, 1698, being at that time in very poor health, the consequence of a fall while hunting, he returned the Seals to the King. In the autumn of the

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following year he went abroad; but though he found in a private life—so far as the life of a man of his princely station can be private—a happiness often denied to placemen and favourites, he was not to be diverted from the post of danger when the time came. Were I writing an eulogium merely, I should here enumerate those great posts and offices which he so worthily filled at the time of Queen Anne's death, when as Lord Treasurer of England, Lord Chamberlain, and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland—an aggregation of honours I believe without precedent—he performed services and controlled events on the importance of which his enemies, no less than his friends, are agreed. But I forbear, and leave the task to a worthier hand.

This being so, it remains only to speak of Matthew Smith and his accomplice. Had my lord chosen to move in the matter, there can be no doubt that Smith would have been whipped and pilloried, and in this way would have come by a short road to his deserts. But the duke held himself too high, and the men who had injured him too low, for revenge, and Smith, after lying some months in prison, gave useful information, and was released without prosecution. Subsequently he tried to raise a fresh charge against the duke, but gained no credence, and, rapidly sinking lower and lower, he was to be seen two years later skulking in rags in the darkest part of the old Savoy. In London I must have walked hourly in dread of him; at Eyford I was safe; and after the winter of '99, in which year he came to my lord's house to beg, looking broken and diseased, I never saw him.

I was told that he expected to receive a rich reward in the event of the duke's disgrace, and on this account was indifferent to the loss of his situation in my lady's family. It seems probable, however, that he hoped to retain his influence in that quarter by means of his wife, and, thwarted in this by that evil woman's dismissal, was no better disposed to her than she was to him. They separated; but before he went the ruffian revenged himself by beating her so severely that she was long confined to her apart-

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ments, was robbed by her landlady, and finally was put to the door penniless, and with no trace of the beauty which had once chained my heart. In this plight, reduced to be the drudge of a tradesman's wife, and sunk to the very position in which I had found her at Mr. D——'s, she made a last desperate appeal to the duke for assistance.

He answered by the grant of a pension, small but sufficient—on which she might have ended her days in a degree of comfort. But, having acquired in her former circumstances an unfortunate craving for drink, which she had now the power to gratify, she lived but a little while, and that in great squalor and misery, dying, if I remember rightly, in a public-house in Spitalfields in the year 1703.

THE END



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